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DARKIE DAN, THE COLORED DETECTIVE; or, The Mississippi Mystery.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "FREELANCE, THE BUCCANEER," "THE DARE DEVIL,"
"THE CRETAN ROVER," "THE PIRATE PRINCE," ETC., ETC.



UPON HIS BODY STOOD THE NEGRO BOY, THE STOCK OF HIS GUN BROKEN OFF, AND THE BARRELS GRASPED IN HIS HAND.

Darkie Dan,
THE COLORED DETECTIVE;
 OR,
 The Mississippi Mystery.

A ROMANCE OF THE SUNNY SOUTH.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
 AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MON-
 TEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "CAPTAIN
 KYD," "SEA SLIPPER," ETC.

• PROLOGUE.

SCENE FIRST.

A HORSE was dashing through a forest at full speed, and with outstretched neck, rolling eyes and reckless bounds frantically running he cared not where, for behind him with untiring speed were a pack of gaunt wolves, half-a-score in number.

With glaring eyes, red, hanging tongues and glittering teeth they ran silently on in pursuit of their victims, for a rider was upon the horse, a fair young girl of twelve, whose face was beautiful in spite of its pallor, and whose wealth of golden curls floated far behind her.

Seated firmly in the saddle, her left hand grasping the rein, her right rising and falling as she dealt severe blows with her gold-mounted riding whip upon the straining animal, she had not lost her presence of mind, even with that red pack so close upon her, and a fearful death staring her in the face.

Along the woodland path the horse sped with a swiftness to which his mad terror gave wings, and eagerly the young girl glanced ahead, and then fearfully behind, to see if succor came in view, or if the end must soon come.

A turn of the road, and when the gaunt wolves were not twenty paces away, brought her in sight of a lane, with a pasture upon either side, and far in the distance on the hill was visible a grand old mansion embowered in foliage.

It was her home, and yet well she knew that ere one-third of the distance there was gone over the wolves would have dragged her noble horse down, and a horrible death would be hers.

But just as she reeled in her saddle at the dread thought of a doom so fearful, there came from her lips a wild cry:

"Dan! Dan! save me! oh! save me!"

Over the pasture went the piercing shriek for help, and back came the answer:

"I will, Missy Gertrude!"

Up from the grass where he was idly lying watching a herd of cattle sprung a negro boy of fifteen, and grasping up something that lay by his side, he threw himself upon the back of a shaggy Indian pony feeding near, and away darted the little animal straight for the fence that barred the pasture from the lane.

Heading right obliquely, and with a speed one would not have believed the pony capable of, the negro boy reached the fence just as the young girl swept by like the wind, and with a wild cry to the animal sent him over with the leap of a deer, right before the leading wolf.

"Oh, Dan, they will kill you!" cried the young girl, and she tugged hard upon her reins to check her flying horse; but in vain, as the fear-maddened animal felt not the pressure on his bit, and flew on as before.

Though momentarily startled by the sudden coming into their midst of a horse and rider, the wolves, half-famished and maddened, set upon the pony with savage yelps, and instantly a fierce struggle began.

Out of the writhing mass and the dust came two shots, and savage growls, a shriek of the terrified pony, in whose flesh the cruel fangs had sunk, and the loud, stern cries of the brave boy, mingled with growls and yelps of the pack, and then out of the *melee* skulked half a dozen wolves in full flight back down the lane, and upon the ground lay the little horse they had dragged down, and upon his body stood the negro boy, the stock of his gun broken off, and the barrels grasped in his hand, the proud victor of the scene.

What cared that brave boy for his wounds, made by the sharp teeth of the pack, and what cared he for the dead pony beneath his feet?

Nothing! for he had saved his young mistress from a fearful fate, and he was a hero of heroes, though his face was black, and the brand of slavery was upon his brow.

As he stood there, gazing with pride upon the five dead wolves his prowess had slain, the rapid clatter of hoofs caused him to turn his head, and up dashed two persons, while some distance behind them a crowd of negroes were coming on foot.

One of the two who arrived mounted was the young girl, her face flushed now, and her horse covered with foam.

The other was a tall, dark-faced man of striking appearance and dignified mien; but he threw himself from the thoroughbred steed he rode, and grasping the boy in his strong arms, said in tremulous tones:

"Dan, my noble boy, you have saved my child from a fearful death; aye, risked your own life to save her, and from this moment I set you free, and the day that I forget you may God forget me."

"Master, I don't want ter be free, sir; I wants ter always lib with you and Missy Gertrude," replied the boy, as tears of joy rolled down his dark cheeks.

"Then you shall live with us, Dan; but you are no longer a slave; remember that."

"I will remember, sir; but I is so glad I save Missy Gertrude."

"God bless you, Dan; it was a lucky day I made you cowboy and gave you that gun; but from to-day I wish you to live up at the mansion, and I will make you my especial valet.

"But you are bleeding and badly hurt; here, boys, take Dan up to the mansion, and one of you spring upon my horse and go for Doctor Brandon at full speed," and Fenton Delamere, the wealthy and aristocratic Mississippi planter, turned to the slaves who just then approached, while he caught the boy in his arms, for Dan had fainted from loss of blood.

SCENE SECOND.

A MAN was standing in a small graveyard, across which fell the shadow of a Gothic church.

It was a humble village of the dead, for only rude head-stones marked the graves, excepting here and there where a marble slab reared itself above the others, and further on, environed by an iron fence where slept what seemed the "select few" of those who slumbered in their last earthly habitation.

The church was the property of one man, built on his own plantation, and the little graveyard was where slept his dead slaves and those of his own blood, and he who stood silently gazing down upon the new-made mound at his feet, was Fenton Delamere, the Planter, and the proprietor of Idlerest, the name of his lordly home half a mile distant.

A short half-hour before a group had gathered in the church-yard, and a body had been lowered into the grave, a victim of a steamer that had been burned a few miles above on the river.

He had been recognized as one bearing the name of Delamere, and had been taken to the Idlerest burying-ground for interment, and, after those who had attended the service had gone, Fenton Delamere still remained, gazing moodily down upon the mound of earth, and unmindful that the shadows of night would soon gather around him.

"Ah, Oscar, little did you think that your plans against me would be stopped by the hand of death, for, when last we met you swore that neither Heaven or Hell should thwart you in your fell purpose."

"How idle your threat, this fresh earth above you now tells; but I forgive you, now that you lie here; yes, I forgive you all the past, and, as proof of that forgiveness you lie here in my own burying-place, for, when I die, there will I rest."

As he spoke, Fenton Delamere pointed to a spot a few feet distant from where he stood, and upon which a ray of sunlight struggling through the foliage had fallen.

"I ask not your forgiveness, Fenton Delamere."

With a start, and half uttered cry the Planter turned, to start back with horror, and stand like one struck dumb with terror, for his eyes glared, his face was colorless, and his lips quivered while his hands were clinched tight together, until the nails cut into the flesh.

"You seem not to like my coming, Fenton."

The speaker was a man of a strangely dark

face, black piercing eyes, jetty hair, and strikingly like the Planter in feature and form.

He was elegantly attired, as far as the cut and texture of his clothing went, though there was a flashy air about him, in the quantity of jewelry he wore, that betokened the gambler, or river sport, so often seen on the Mississippi twenty-five years ago.

He seemed about forty years of age, and upon his dark, reckless face, rested a cruel smile, while in his eyes was a look of triumph, as he fixed them upon the Planter.

"Good God! Oscar Delamere, I believed that I stood above your grave," at last broke quivering from the lips of the Planter.

"Ha! ha! ha! you did not think that I would die before I kept my oath, did you, Fenton Delamere?" asked the stranger, in a mocking tone.

For an instant the Planter made no reply; then, gazing into the face that looked into his own, he spoke, and as though thinking aloud:

"He was so strangely like him in form, and the face, scarred by the flames, I thought was his, while the clothes, the papers found on his body and addressed to him, all made up what I, with others, believed conclusive proof."

"Yet here I stand before you in the flesh, Fenton Delamere," was the sneering response.

"Ay, and would to God! for your sake and mine, that you lay in the grave at our feet! but, for Heaven's sake! tell me, Oscar Delamere who it is that lies beneath this mound?" and the Planter put his foot upon the new-made grave.

"You say that he had papers with him bearing my name?"

"Yes."

"Have you them?"

"Yes."

"Give them to me!"

The Planter took from the breast pocket of his coat a bundle of papers and handed them silently to the man whom he had called Oscar Delamere, who asked in the same sneering way, and which seemed his habitual way of speaking:

"You ask who lies there?"

"Yes."

"My sycophant, my tool, whose accidental likeness to me I turn to account when it suits me."

"I was arrested for robbery, but was not guilty; as it was a mistaken affair, the clay beneath our feet being the culprit, I had a desire to see my counterpart, and aided his escape from justice thereby making him my slave."

"We were on the steamer together, coming to see you; it took fire, he lost his nerve, and there he lies; I kept my presence and here I am."

"Why were you coming to seek me?"

"Oh, on a matter of business."

"We have nothing in common that you should come to me."

"You are mistaken, sir; I need money, and you are rich."

"I have already largely aided you."

"And will do it again."

"Never!"

"That is a bad word to me, for 'tis too often broken; I have a proposition to make to you."

"Well?"

"You have a daughter, now in her fourteenth year?"

"Well?"

"I have a son who is now twenty and I desire that she become his wife."

That Oscar Delamere was an evil man the reader may surmise, and that it might be like father like son, can also be believed: but that the proposition made to Fenton Delamere could turn him into a madman was strange indeed.

Yet, like a tiger springing upon his prey, like a man gone mad, attacking a victim, did Fenton Delamere leap upon the one whom a few moments before he had hoped, and believing lay in the grave at his feet, and seizing him by the throat endeavor to crush him in his strong grasp.

But the man he assailed was possessed of great power and activity, and wrenching himself loose from the Planter's grasp, he drew a pistol and springing backward cried:

"You have sealed your doom, Fenton Delamere, for your accursed fingers have been upon my throat, and I shall kill you; ay, kill you and yet revel in your wealth, and your fair daughter shall be degraded to the lowest level my hate can bring her to. Die!"

The flash and report followed as he thrust

his hand forward; but the bullet whizzed above the Planter's head, for the arm had been struck upward, as the finger touched the trigger, and a grasp of iron was upon the throat of Oscar Delamere, while a hoarse voice said:

"Say the word, master, and I will kill him, and bury him in the grave where he rightly belongs."

The planter trembled violently, and the word to pronounce the doom of Oscar Delamere trembled upon his lips; but, with an effort, he said sternly:

"No, Dan, let him live, for I want not his blood upon my conscience."

Instantly the grasp of iron was released from the throat, and staggering back the man gasped for breath, while the dark eyes of the young negro eyed him fixedly, as he said:

"Go, sir, and know that you owe your life to my master."

"Ay, thou accursed black hell-bound, I will go; but you forget not, that Oscar Delamere will one day remember but too well Fenton Delamere and his slave, Darkie Dan," hissed the maddened man, as he turned and strode quickly away from the little burying-ground, and was soon lost in the gathering gloom of the forest, for night was casting its mantle over the earth.

SCENE THIRD.

ADOWN the murky Mississippi a magnificent steamer was gliding along, her escape-pipes sending forth many an echo from the dark shores upon either side, and her watery pathway lighted up only by the glimmering stars in the firmament.

Forward a group of "hands" were singing the old cotton-field songs of the South, and making rare melody, although they were slaves and their voices wild and untutored.

Within the cabin the notes of a piano were heard, and the passengers were whiling away the time as suited their humor, while in the social hall card-tables had been brought into requisition and planters and sports were engaged in gambling for high stakes.

A looker-on at one of these tables was Fenton Delamere, and his gaze was riveted with that fixed interest, that proved that card-playing for gold held a fascination for him hard to resist; but, at last with a determined effort at self-control, he turned away, and leaving the saloon went on deck.

A chilly air was blowing, and it had driven all promenaders below, and only the dark form of the pilot at his wheel was visible to the Planter, as he strode aft, looking at the white wake left by the steamer.

Thus standing and gazing down into the dark depths, Fenton Delamere became lost in thought, and heard not, nor saw a man cautiously approaching him.

Nearer and nearer the form crept, the noise of the escape pipes and paddle-wheels drowning any sound he might have made upon the cinder-strewn deck, and at last he paused within a few feet of the unsuspecting victim.

Then a cane swung quickly in the air, and fell heavily upon the head of Fenton Delamere, who sunk to the deck without a moan.

"Now, Fenton Delamere, your life has ended," hissed the one who had dealt the cruel blow, and stooping over he raised him in his arms to hurl him into the river, when suddenly a form darted forward and a stunning blow caused the intended assassin to drop the Planter and reel backward, and, before he could recover himself he was in turn seized in a powerful grasp, and thrown from the deck down, down into the foaming wake.

Quickly turning, the man who had just thrown a human being into the waters to die, raised the Planter in his arms, and swiftly descended to the saloon, where he cried:

"Quick! my master has fallen on deck and hurt his head; is there a doctor on board?"

"I am a physician," said a gentleman hastily rising from a card-table, and he bent over the prostrate form, and, after a short examination, said slowly:

"He has fallen and struck the back of his head, cutting it, and stunning him, but the wound is by no means fatal."

"Thank God!"

The ejaculation came from the lips of Darkie Dan, and raising his master again in his arms he bore him to his state-room, the physician following.

Thus end the three introductory scenes to my story of Darkie Dan, the Black Nemesis.

CHAPTER I.

THE PLOTTERS.

IN one of the characteristic *cabarets*, or wine-shops, of New Orleans, situated in the French municipality, sat two men in conversation, which was of an evidently interesting nature, as their manner was earnest and their voices low.

One of these men was tall, heavily formed, and wore a full beard, and long curling hair fell upon his shoulders, while his appearance was that of a man raised in refinement, and he was one to attract a second glance in any assemblage, owing to the darkly-bronzed skin, the piercing black eyes, and the golden hue of his whiskers and curls.

He was well dressed, though he wore a quantity of jewelry, and his feet and hands were small and shapely, while his age seemed unfathomable, and he might be but twenty-eight, and perhaps a score of years older.

His companion was a young man of twenty-one or two, slightly and elegantly formed, dressed like an exquisite, and with a face that was handsome, yet sinister, and which bore a resemblance to his companion's.

The room in which they sat was well furnished, and between them was a table upon which stood a decanter of brandy and glasses, and a portfolio of papers lay open before them.

"You are satisfied that you will always win?" said the younger of the two.

"I will give ocular demonstration if you please, and being an expert yourself it will be proof; here, shuffle these cards and deal them," and the man threw a pack upon the table which the other took up indolently, and quietly shuffled and dealt out, and a game was begun.

"You certainly won that time," said the younger man.

"And will every time, Carlyon; deal again," was the calm reply, and another game was won as before.

"Try again!" said the one called Carlyon.

"Certainly; we will play three straight games; you will win the first, I the second and you the third."

"You certainly have mastered cards: tell me your secret."

"No, Carlyon, it is one that shall benefit you, but I shall keep it, for it has cost me nearly two years of study by day and night; now will you give me the money, for mine, as you know, I have run through with."

"Yes; here is the amount; count it and see that there are five thousand dollars there, and remember that I aim to have half your winnings."

"Yes, here is the paper I have drawn up, and to-morrow I take the steamer Eclipse for Vicksburg, and shall begin my work."

"And will soon win a name as the champion sport; but how soon do you intend to begin to work your plot against Fenton Delamere?"

"Oh, I shall lay my plans carefully, for as I now am, he will never recognize me, and I pledge you that I shall ruin him within the year, and that his wealth shall be mine," and a triumphant glitter came into the man's eyes.

"And his daughter?"

"Shall be your wife if you wish it, though I prefer to degrade her."

"Let her be my wife; in her eyes, when she knows all, that will be degradation sufficient."

"As you please, Carlyon; my revenge will be complete when I make Fenton Delamere a beggar, and I possess his wealth, and see him groveling in disgrace and shame."

"You will have to be careful not to rouse him, as you know he is a dangerous man if he considers himself wronged," said Carlyon.

"I fear that accursed shadow of his far more."

"You mean the negro?"

"Yes, Darkie Dan; he it was who saved Fenton Delamere at the grave that day, and who hurled me into the river, for I saw his black face as he grasped me in his arms; but one day that fellow shall be my slave, and then my time shall come for persecuting him; but come, I must go the steamer, for she starts at five, and I would like you to see me off."

"With pleasure, and I await your return with intense anxiety."

Rising, the two men left the room and the *cabaret*, and the plot against Fenton Delamere had begun.

CHAPTER II.

THE KING OF DIAMONDS.

ADOWN the mighty Mississippi, some months after the scene in the New Orleans *cabaret*,

steamed one of those magnificent Floating Palaces, so long the pride of the rolling torrent to which the Indians gave the name Father of Waters.

The moon rode in a cloudless sky, dimming with her luster her starry attendants, and lighting up the murky waters until they gleamed like melted silver, and relieving the gloom of the darkly-wooded shores, here and there dotted with the white villas of the rich planters, or a small village nestling upon the river's bank.

Within the brilliantly-lighted cabins of the steamer were gathered the passengers, some conversing, others singing, a few reading, here and there one writing a letter to the loved ones at home, and far forward a card-table group, engaged in gambling, with a number of others standing around watching with deepest interest a game that was being played for higher stakes than usual, even among the princely sports of the Mississippi thirty years ago.

When the game commenced in the early evening, four men sat at the table; but the stakes soon ran so high that two were forced to withdraw, and the couple who remained were seemingly reckless of what was lost or won.

One of these was a man of forty-five, possessing a military air, dressed in a *neglige*, but costly style, and with the courtly address of the wealthy and cultivated Southern planter.

Upon his head was a soft gray felt hat, the rim drawn down over his eyes, as though to shield them from the light, and he played with a nerve that was remarkable, considering that he had lost heavily, and was still recklessly risking large sums on each game.

Glancing suddenly up at his companion, the face of Fenton Delamere was revealed.

His opponent was a man who had lately flashed like a meteor before the sporting fraternity, and whose constant success with cards had gained for him the name of the King of Diamonds, for, besides being more lucky with the diamonds, than the clubs, hearts and spades of a pack, he wore a profusion of these precious gems upon his person.

Answering to the name of Don Del Morte, and claiming to be a Brazilian, though his English was perfect, he had suddenly appeared as a Mississippi river sport, and was a sure winner whenever large sums were at stake.

Of his past life nothing was known, and he claimed to be a gambler by profession; but the reader will recognize him as the dark-faced, blonde-haired and bearded man who was plotting with one Carlyon, in the New Orleans *cabaret*.

He was dressed in a blue-black velvet coat, a white satin vest and black broadcloth pants, and wore a soft dove-colored hat of the finest felt, while in his embroidered shirt front was a diamond of rare size and great value, and the match to it was on the little finger of his left hand.

A heavy gold watch-chain encircled his neck, and conspicuously crossed his breast, and in his shirt-cuffs were solitaires of great beauty.

"Well, Mr. Delamere, I am still the winner," he said, in a low tone, as he drew toward him a large pile of gold and bank-notes.

"I need not to be informed of that fact, Don Del Morte," was the abrupt response of the planter, for the first time annoyed.

"Shall we continue?" pleasantly asked the King of Diamonds.

"Yes, if you will accept my note at sixty days for what sums I may bet."

"Certainly, for the note of Mr. Fenton Delamere is good for just half-a-million dollars in real estate and slaves, and I never heard of it being on the market before."

"Nor has it been, sir; and if luck does not desert me, it will not be now; but you seem to have taken pains to interest yourself in my affairs."

"Only a friendly interest, sir; but what shall the stake be?"

"Suit yourself, Don Del Morte."

"Say fifty thousand, which is just the sum I have won from you to-night."

"So be it; well, Dan, what is it?" and Fenton Delamere turned to a tall, fine-looking negro, with clean cut features, full of determination and spirit, and the form of an Apollo.

It was Darkie Dan; no longer the little cowboy who had saved Gertrude Delamere from the wolves five years before, but grown into a splendid specimen of manhood, polite, respectful to all, but firm as a rock in duty to his master and those he loved.

At the question of Mr. Delamere, Darkie Dan approached, and with a courtesy he had copied from his master, looked at Don Del Morte and those around, and bowing, said politely:

"Pardon me, please, gentlemen."

Then he leant over and whispered in Fenton Delamere's ear, and what he said caused the Planter's face to flush; but he answered, half-angrily:

"All right, Dan, let me alone."

The negro bowed and retired back to the outer edge of the crowd, a pained look upon his face, and Fenton Delamere turned to his opponent and said abruptly:

"The stake is fifty thousand, and I give my note for that amount if I lose."

"That is as I understand it, sir," was the reply, and the game was begun.

CHAPTER III.

LOST AND WON.

WHEN the game commenced between the gambler and the Planter, the bystanders gathered around the table with far greater interest than was usually felt in a game of cards; but then the stakes seldom ran as high, although many a man had gambled away his all in one night, and then, too, the players were no ordinary men.

Fenton Delamere was well known on the river, and none doubted his nerve and courage, and though popular with his associates, he had no intimates, and those who knew him best felt that he was a man that would be dangerous if aroused.

Don Del Morte had also become an object of special interest on the river, for he was an acknowledged sport, traveled the river merely to ply his profession, and in several encounters that had been forced upon him, for he seemed never to seek a quarrel, he had more than held his own, and the earth was said to be dotted with several graves which his ready hand and deadly aim had filled.

If there were those present who did not believe that luck alone settled upon the gamblers, and that he was a trickster with cards, they did not care to say so; but they felt that should his good fortune continue, and Fenton Delamere suspect him of trickery with the cards there would be an outbreak that would end fatally.

With a reckless smile upon his lips Don Del Morte dealt the cards and the two men took them up and the game was begun.

Carefully, calmly and in perfect silence the men played through, and the game was won by the gambler.

"Captain, give me pen, ink and paper, please," said Fenton Delamere with perfect composure, turning to the steamer's captain who was standing near.

"Here, boy, bring pen, ink and paper here," called out the captain, addressing Darkie Dan, who stood apart, but with eye and ear on the *qui vive* to know the termination of the game.

"No, master, I cannot do it, sir," firmly answered Dan, yet speaking with the utmost politeness.

"Did you hear my order, sir?" yelled the captain, not accustomed to being disputed or disobeyed on his own craft.

"I did, master, but I cannot obey, sir."

"Cannot obey? But by Heaven you shall, you black dog, or I shall know why!" and the captain was furious.

"I will not do one act to aid in the robbery of my master by a gambler, sir," said Darkie Dan with the same polite firmness of tone and manner.

"I gave you an order and you shall obey it!" and the captain sprung toward the negro, who never flinched.

"He shall not hold! Captain Guerney, lay not your hand on that man or you answer to me," and Fenton Delamere now sprung to his feet, and confronted the irate commander of the steamer.

"What! do you uphold your slave in impudence to me, Mr. Delamere?"

"He was not impudent, and he was right in refusing to see me ruin myself: besides he is as free as you are to-day, I having given him his freedom years ago."

"I asked for pen, ink and paper, and you have servants on your boat to do your bidding, but Dan shall not, if he declines."

Captain Guerney knew Fenton Delamere well, and he was a man he cared not to anger, or whose patronage he wished to lose, so he answered:

"As you please, Mr. Delamere; but I wish I had some one to look after my interest as that negro does after yours; here, steward, bring writing materials for Mr. Delamere," and the captain called out to one of his own men, who hastily obeyed, and the Planter reseated himself at the table and wrote out his note at sixty days for the amount he had lost.

"I hope this has not frightened you, sir," smiled Don Del Morte in his sinister way.

Nettled by the manner of the gambler, Fenton Delamere retorted:

"If you knew me better, Don Del Morte, you would know that I have torn the word fear from my vocabulary."

"Ah! few men have that nerve, either in facing bodily danger, or in meeting pecuniary reverses; of course then you wish me to give you a chance to win back your note?"

"Yes, and we will call it for one hundred thousand this time, the note to be covered by real estate or slaves as security, as you please."

A murmur of surprise went the round of the group of lookers-on, as this large sum was so composedly named by the Planter, and once more the game of chance was begun, cautiously played to the end, and—*lost by Fenton Delamere*.

All eyes turned upon the Planter, and Darkie Dan moved uneasily before him, as though striving to catch his eye; but this his master studiously avoided, and taking up the pen, with a firm hand wrote another note for the amount of the stake just lost.

"Perhaps Mr. Delamere would like to leave off now?" came in the insinuating voice of the gambler, and behind whose quiet tones lay so much of hidden meaning.

"When you or I, sir, are beggars, then will I quit the game," was the stern response, and a third note was written and thrown upon the table as collateral.

With an indifferent air Don Del Morte took it up, and arching his strongly-marked brows with surprise, said coolly:

"This about covers what you are worth, after deducting the amounts I have won from you."

"It does; in real estate, slaves and stock, that note covers everything," was the low, but firm reply.

"And you wish to stake this large note, sir?"

"I do."

"Then deal the cards, sir, and we shall see who will sink or swim."

The gambler took up the cards, when Darkie Dan again came near and whispered to his master,

"Ah! you are right, Dan; Don Del Morte, permit me to request that you place your stake on the table, sir."

The gambler's face flushed, and he glanced quickly at Dan, while he said in an annoyed tone:

"May I ask, sir, if that negro was your mentor in this suggestion?"

"He was."

"I have a mind to mark him in a way that he will remember me."

"I shouldn't advise you to make the attempt, for I am responsible for him, and I thank him for the suggestion, and beg that you place a sum on the table to cover my notes."

"I will put the two notes you gave me, the money I won from you, and an equal sum of my own, and give you my note for the balance."

"Your note, sir, I would not take; but you have diamonds, and—"

"True, and I have one here to back me; will you not, Captain Guerney?"

"With my boat, sir, for I know you are worth it," replied the captain.

"All right, sir," said Fenton Delamere, sternly, and once more the players bent every energy to the work before them, and with a silence and slowness that was painful to the lookers-on the game was played to the bitter end—ay, to the bitter end for Fenton Delamere, as he was a beggar.

CHAPTER IV.

DARKIE DAN'S GRIPPE OF IRON.

"Oh, God! you have won, and I have lost!"

The low cry came from the lips of Fenton Delamere, and knowing that he had beggared himself he buried his livid face in his hands; but only for an instant, as a touch on his shoulder aroused him.

It was the face of the gambler, calm and smiling that looked into his own, and the words he uttered were pleasant music to the ears of the unfortunate man, for he said:

"Mr. Delamere, there is a chance for you to win back your riches."

"What?" and the Planter stared at him as though he could not believe his words.

"I mean it; I will play you five games, the best three in the five winning, if you will put up against all I have here before me, of what I have won from you, and my own, a stake I shall name."

"Name it, sir," was the stern command.

"Do you pledge yourself to put up the stake?"

"I tell you you have beggared me, for I have nothing," was the bitter reply.

"I say you have a stake I will risk this fortune against."

"And I say name it," was the almost pettish retort.

"You pledge yourself then?"

The Planter hesitated for an instant, and then, as though utterly reckless of consequences, said firmly:

"Yes."

"Upon your honor?"

"Thou accursed card trickster, do you doubt my word?" said Fenton Delamere, savagely, and his words brought an evil glitter to the gambler's eyes, but he responded calmly:

"I ask for your pledge; do you give it?"

"My word is as good as my oath, my pledge or my note."

"Enough! now let us play."

"But the stake?"

"Enough that I risk my fortune against your pledge to produce it; our game is the best three in five."

"Yes, and the chances are in my favor unless you are aided by Satan, or—"

"Or what, Mr. Delamere?" asked Don Del Morte, as the Planter paused.

"Or are the accursed cheat that some men call you," came the bold reply.

"Insults I always treasure up, Mr. Delamere, to be paid for at a more convenient season," was the smiling answer of the Brazilian.

"Any season you may seek to resent an insult from me, Don Del Morte, will be acceptable; but let me here say that, if I caught you at any trickery in a game with me, I would kill you, and have Dan throw you overboard."

"Oh! Darkie Dan and myself will become more intimate yet, if luck does not desert me this time; but it has, for see, the game is yours."

"One in five," muttered the Planter, and once more the cards were shuffled and dealt, Fenton Delamere, with his change of luck, showing considerable nervousness, for he knew as he then stood he had gambled away his slaves, his home, where lay buried the bones of his forefathers, and all he possessed, while what that mysterious stake was that the gambler was risking so much against greatly disturbed his mind.

"Again you have won, Mr. Delamere," said Don Del Morte, as the second time victory perched upon the Planter's banner.

"Two out of five," was the low reply, and with an effort at self-command that was successful, Fenton Delamere commenced the third game white-faced, but perfectly calm.

"Your luck has changed, Mr. Delamere," said the gambler, quietly.

"We are even now, and the next is the deciding game, Mr. Delamere," remarked Don Del Morte when the fourth had ended in his favor.

Not a sound; other than the loud cannon-like puffing of the steamer's escape-pipes, broke the silence, and two score of eager faces bent over the table before which the men sat playing a game of such intense import.

"I have won, Mr. Delamere."

The Planter heard the low, ominous words, and did not move, but sat like one dazed by some dread shock.

"Mr. Delamere, would you know my stake?"

"Yes," was the mechanical reply.

"Lean forward, that I may whisper it in your ear."

The words of the gambler caused the crowd to instinctively fall back, all but one person, and he drew nearer.

And that one was Darkie Dan.

"Let me whisper it to you," repeated the gambler, and Fenton Delamere leaned forward, and like hot iron piercing his heart the

words fell upon him; as, in a low, distinct tone, Don Del Morte said:

"I have a friend, a noble youth, for he is not a gambler such as I, and he loves your daughter, and the stake I have won from you is your pledged word that sixty days from date she shall become his wife, and that day I shall return to you the notes I hold of yours."

Fenton Delamere heard every word, and they seared his brain; but he sat like a statue, his face livid, his eyes fixed upon the gambler, who had made this strange proposition to him.

Then all of a sudden he seemed to realize that he had been tricked by the gambler, who had played for this one end, from some deep, mysterious cause, and like a madman he sprung to his feet and started toward the man who had ruined him, shouting:

"Accursed devil, I will tear your tongue from your throat."

Instantly the hand of Don Del Morte was thrust into his bosom and withdrawn with a quick movement, and a pistol gleamed in it.

But, with the flash and report came a ringing of glass as the bullet shattered the chandelier above, the arm of the gambler having been clutched in a gripe of iron, and bent upward irresistibly, just as his finger touched the trigger.

"Curse you, you black hound of Hades! you shall die for that act! Release me, slave!" cried Don Del Morte.

"No, master, not as long as your hand holds a weapon to turn against my master," was Darkie Dan's firm response.

"Release him, Dan, for I was mad to seek here a revenge that can be better consummated elsewhere at another time," said Fenton Delamere, now perfectly calm, and standing with his arms folded upon his breast, the pistol-shot having seemingly recalled him to reason.

Instantly Darkie Dan let go his hold and stepped backward fearlessly, although the gambler seemed as though about to turn upon him.

But the crowd of planters, who mostly comprised the passengers moved forward threateningly, and Don Del Morte saw that he would be severely dealt with, did he harm the negro who had so bravely saved his master's life, and he answered sneeringly:

"As you say, Fenton Delamere, it is better that we settle this quarrel at another time and another place."

"Yes, having disgraced myself to play cards with you, I will again waive your not being a gentleman and meet you at any time and place you may select, and with what weapons you please."

"So be it, I am content, and will send you a line, when and where I will meet you, to the St. Charles to-morrow, for there I suppose you will stop," coolly responded the gambler.

"Yes; and if I fail to hear from you I shall shoot you at sight."

"I shall not fail you, Mr. Delamere," and the gambler turned away, lighted a cigar, and went on deck for a promenade, while, followed by Darkie Dan, Fenton Delamere sought his state-room to brood over his misfortunes.

CHAPTER V.

MR. CARLYON NORMAN MAKES A CALL.

"MASTER, you are not going to meet that man, sir?"

It was Darkie Dan who spoke, and he leaned against the window, in a pleasant room in the St. Charles Hotel, while Fenton Delamere, with pale face and clouded brow, paced to and fro with monotonous tread, his hands clasped behind his back.

"Yes, Dan, I must meet him if he sends me word as he promised."

"But he is only a gambler, sir, with nobody to respect or care for him, while you hab everything to lib for," answered Darkie Dan, whose association with refinement in his master's home, had gotten him out of the broken style of speaking so common among the "field-hands" of the South.

"Ah, Dan, I have nothing but my two children now left, for I am a beggar, as it were, and I dare not even meet them," said Mr. Delamere sadly.

"Oh, sir, Master Frank is strong and brave, and Missy Gertrude will not say one word, sir, when she sees how sorry you are."

"You are a noble fellow, Dan, with a heart that most white men might be proud of; but there is some one at the door."

The negro went to the door and a servant handed in a card.

"Mr. Carlyon Norman," read Fenton Delamere aloud, and turning to the bell-boy he added:

"Ask the gentleman to come up."

A few moments more passed and Carlyon Norman entered.

It was the same young man that had been plotting with the gambler in the cabaret, and he was dressed in the hight of fashion, though with a flashy air that displayed lack of good taste.

"Mr. Delamere, I believe?" he said politely.

"That is my name, sir, but you have the advantage of me," replied the Planter stiffly.

"My name is Carlyon Norman, sir."

"So I saw by the card; but may I ask your business with me?"

"When we are alone, yes sir," and the young man glanced at the negro.

"Never mind my servant, sir; pray proceed."

"Ah, your shadow as it were; hearing what you hear, deaf if you wish it, and blind when required; a faithful person to have near you, Mr. Delamere."

"Mr. Norman, I asked your business with me, and, as I care not to be rude in my own room, I beg that you make it known."

There was that in the words and manner of the Planter that was conclusive proof to Mr. Carlyon Norman that he would not stand trifling, and he said quickly:

"Well, Mr. Delamere, I come from my friend Don Del Morte, better known to river men as the Diamond King."

"Ah yes; you are the representative of that person are you; well, sir, has he decided upon a place of meeting between us, the time, and what weapons he desires to use, as I have kindly honored him by waiving the right to claim that he should be a gentleman, and am willing to fight him as though he were."

"Mr. Delamere, you seem to forget that Don Del Morte is my friend."

"Looking at you, sir, I cannot forget that you represent a blackguard," was the hot reply.

The face of Carlyon Norman turned very pale, and seeing that he had allowed his bitter feelings to find words when he should not, the Planter quickly added:

"Pardon me, Mr. Norman, for I had forgotten myself so far as to fail in the duty of a host; be seated, sir, please, and let me know the terms of this meeting between Don Del Morte and myself."

The young man seemed appeased by this change of base on the part of the Planter, and, though still remaining standing, said politely:

"Del Morte begs that you meet him to-night—"

"To-night, sir?"

"Yes, Mr. Delamere, for it is moonlight and as bright almost as day."

"Go on, sir."

"The meeting is to take place at the dueling-ground, which you doubtless know well, and at midnight, as that hour will enable us to attend the opera and then be in time."

"As you please, sir, I shall be there; but what weapons are to be used?"

"Pistols are too noisy toys to use, so suppose we say short swords?"

"Either will suit me, Mr. Norman," and the Planter bowed stiffly, and Carlyon Norman taking the hint departed, and Fenton Delamere was again alone with Darkie Dan, who had been a most attentive listener to every word said.

CHAPTER VI.

DARKIE DAN'S PLEDGE.

It was verging upon midnight when two men descended from a buggy, at the edge of a grove of live-oaks in the vicinity of New Orleans, and one of them walked slowly away, while the other, after hitching the horse securely, took a bundle from the seat and followed.

"We are first here, Dan," and as the speaker turned to his companion who had joined him, the faces of Fenton Delamere and his servant were revealed.

"Yes, master, and I hope we will be the only ones here, sir."

"Oh! never fear, Dan, they will come, for I am convinced that somewhere I have met that Del Morte before, and that he has some deep reason for wishing me out of the way."

"Then I would not meet him, sir."

"I must; I have beggared my children, and

death were preferable to life," said the Planter bitterly.

"Oh, master! don't talk so, sir."

"I talk as I feel, my good friend, for you are indeed my friend, and I know that in leaving you to have a watchful eye over my poor Gertrude and Frank, no harm will befall them that you can shield them from."

"Master, as I have been to you, sir, so will I be to Master Frank and Missy Gertrude."

"I know it, Dan; if I fall, tell them how the old failing came over me, and like a drunkard who had again tasted the intoxicating cup, I yielded when I played one game, and that honor was lost in the fascination of gaming, and I lost all and have left them beggars, for Gertrude will have only her Quadroon maid Una, and her jewels, and Frank will not possess a thousand dollars in the world I fear."

"Tell them, Dan, that death was a boon, knowing what I had done; and, Dan, tell Gertrude that I knew not the priceless stake I was playing for, when I pledged her marriage to one she had never known; but in my grave, I cannot keep that pledge, and she must not marry that fellow, be he who he may, and you must tell Frank to protect her from the snare into which my sin has drawn her."

"Master, I pledge myself to save her, sir; I am but a poor negro, but I take oath, sir, before Heaven, that while I live, no harm shall befall Missy Gertrude."

The Planter warmly grasped the hand of Darkie Dan and, overcome by his emotions, turned away, just as two horsemen rode up, and, in the moonlight were recognized as the King of Diamonds and Carlyon Norman, his friend.

"Dan, one word more; you knew the one foe of my life; the one who sought to kill me, and whom you hurled to his death in the river, that night on the steamer?"

"Yes, master."

"Well, his name was Oscar Delamere, though he went under assumed names, and in his veins flowed the same blood that is in mine, and, Dan, he has a son."

"Yes, master."

"What the son is, or where, or what like, I know not; but he may be like his father, and may know the mysterious secret that gave his father power over me, and knowing it, he may attempt to wrong my children, and I beg you to protect them, and, if need be only, dig from the grave the fatal secret and give it to Frank."

"Dig from the grave, master?" asked Darkie Dan, in surprise.

"Yes. You know my father's grave in the family burying-ground?"

"Yes, master."

"Well, in the earth beneath his coffin, is buried a tin box of papers; I placed it there myself after the grave was dug, and I alone know the secret up to this minute."

"In that box you will find papers that will tell of a strange mystery, Dan; but, pledge me, that you will not remove it, unless the son of Oscar Delamere turns up to wrong the fair name of my children."

"I swear it, master."

"Enough! now I can die content."

"But, master, you must not die, sir; you are a splendid swordsman, and if you have lost your fortune, you have much to live for."

"Ah! Dan, the shadow is upon the dial, and the sands of my life have run to the end; but come, they have dismounted and await us there in that open space of moonlight," and the Planter led the way to where Don Del Morte and Carlyon Norman stood in grim silence awaiting their coming.

Both glanced up in surprise when they saw that Mr. Delamere was accompanied by only one person, and that one a negro, and Carlyon Norman said quickly:

"We hardly expected your shadow would follow you by night, Mr. Delamere; but where is your second?"

"Dan here, sir, will act as my friend," was the quiet reply.

"Never, sir! this is an insult," cried Carlyon Norman.

"As you please, sir; but Dan acts as my second, or the meeting shall not take place," was the firm response of Fenton Delamere, and in stern silence he awaited the result.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DUEL BY MOONLIGHT.

"I CANNOT put up with this insult, Mr. Delamere, to be pitted against a slave as my equal," said Carlyon Norman, angrily.

"I certainly never intended that you should look upon Dan as your equal, sir, as he is so infinitely your superior; but this affair is irregular all around, and as I am waiving who and what you and the man you represent are, why you must concede to me the second whom I have chosen," said Mr. Delamere, sternly.

Carlyon Norman was about to give vent to some angry reply, when the King of Diamonds's quiet voice was heard.

"Permit me, gentlemen, to be also a little irregular, and settle this seemingly unarrangeable difficulty, by saying that I have no objection whatever to Darkie Dan acting for Mr. Delamere, if such is the desire of my opponent."

"It is, sir."

"Then, *Mister* Darkie Dan, my second will confer with you," and returning his cigarette to his lips, Don Del Morte turned away.

For a moment Carlyon Norman seemed to have a hard struggle with himself to accept Darkie Dan as his equal under the circumstances; but a look from the Diamond King decided him, and he said pettishly:

"Well, I suppose there are really no arrangements necessary, other than to put the swords into the hands of the gentlemen."

"Excepting, master, that I am to see that no advantage is taken," was Darkie Dan's firm but polite reply.

The young second winced, but made no reply, and set about the preliminaries, and soon held a naked sword in his hands, which he was about to hand to his principal, having casually glanced at the blade which Darkie Dan held, when the latter quickly remarked:

"Your sword, sir, seems longer than the one my master is to use."

"No, they are about the same length," was the quick reply.

"Measuring will decide, master," persisted Darkie Dan, and, with a muttered oath Carlyon Norman stepped forward and the measurement proved that the blade to be used by the King of Diamonds was three inches the longest.

"Too bad, for I did not bring a second weapon."

"But my master did, sir, and he prizes his swords as of a most superior kind," replied Dan, and he placed the weapons in the hands of Norman, who examined both critically, and then stepped apart to confer with the King of Diamonds.

It took a long time for so simple a conference as to decide upon the weapons, which a glance would show were of the best workmanship, and exactly alike, and Fenton Delamere called out somewhat impatiently:

"If the gentlemen have pistols and prefer them, I am content, Dan."

"No, the swords will do," said Carlyon Norman himself, and approaching Darkie Dan once more he selected a position for the duelists, and they were called to the spot.

"Master, that man is a devil, sir, so be cautious of him," whispered Dan, as he took his master's coat on his arm, and placed the sword in his hand.

"Good-by, Dan, and remember your pledges to me," said the Planter, sadly.

"Don't say good-by, master," and Darkie Dan's voice trembled.

"Life is uncertain, Dan; tell Gertrude and Frank, if I have made beggars of them, I thought of them with my last breath good-by."

The Planter grasped the honest black hand extended to him, wrung it hard for an instant, and then turned calm and determined to meet his foe.

The face of the King of Diamonds was in the full moonlight, and a smile of fiendish delight seemed to rest upon it, as he held his sword on guard.

A moment after the blades crossed with a vicious ring, and hot and fierce the combat waged, sending back sharp echoes from the live-oak grove, and awakening the birds in their leafy coverts, causing them to utter cries of alarm, while some watchful guard dog from a neighboring homestead, sent up long and dismal howls, as though scenting death upon the breeze.

Calmly, and with folded arms Carlyon Norman stood by, while Darkie Dan moved as his master moved, and kept near, as though anxious to catch any blow that might seek his life.

Both men were certainly skilled swordsmen, and each one seemed to devote his every energy

to the task before him of slaying the other; but suddenly, as though unmanned by some dire thought that crowded upon him, Fenton Delamere began to give ground, his thrusts were not as firm, his parries weakened, and pressing him harder and harder, the King of Diamonds at length got under his guard and drove his sword deep into his bosom.

A groan broke from the lips of the wounded man, and he sunk into the arms of Darkie Dan, who laid him gently upon the ground.

"Dan, I told you that my sands of life were fast running out, and the end has come," he said faintly.

Darkie Dan made no reply, for he had seen the blade go deep into the broad breast, and the cruel hand of the gambler turn it there, ere he drew it back, and he knew that there was no hope.

"Dan, my faithful friend, remember your pledge."

"I have sworn it, master."

"God bless you; good-by, and—"

"One word, please, slave, in your master's ear."

It was the King of Diamonds who spoke, and pushing Darkie Dan aside, he knelt and bent low over the dying man.

The eyes, glazing in death, met his, but Fenton Delamere heard some cruel words whispered hoarsely into his ear, and a cry of anguish broke from his lips, and he then strove hard to speak, and turned piteously to Darkie Dan, who sprung to his side.

"Master! master! what is it?"

"Dan—he—is—"

The red current of life welled up in his throat and choked him, and Fenton Delamere was dead.

"He is dead!" broke in piteous tones from the negro's lips, as he bent over the prostrate form of his master.

"Yes, he is dead, and I came here to kill him; and Darkie Dan, you are my slave now."

With a cry at the harsh words, Darkie Dan sprung to his feet; but strong hands clutched him upon either side, and a pistol was pressed hard against his temple.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLANTATION HOME.

UPON the banks of the Mississippi and back upon a hill that commanded a magnificent view of the surrounding scenery, with the broad river rolling its swift way to the Gulf, stood a grand old mansion, embowered in evergreens, and surrounded with flower-gardens and ornamental grounds that showed the hand of refinement and education in the one who was the possessor of the broad acres.

An avenue of Lombardy poplars led down to the river bank, a quarter of a mile away, and to the left, at the foot of the hill upon which stood the mansion, were two score of white cottages, forming the slave village, and romantically situated upon a broad street, bordered with trees, and through the center of which ran a crystal stream flowing from the high hills inland to mingle its clear waters with the murky tide of the Father of Waters.

Around the mansion, which was a large, rambling, two-storied structure, built for comfort, ran a broad piazza, around the columns of which clung the yellow-jessamine in full bloom, mingling its delicate perfume with the scent of the numberless flowers in the garden.

Within the mansion was a broad hall extending to the rear, and branching off into the wings of the building upon either side, while the large and comfortable rooms were furnished with luxurious taste that made it a home that one would be content to dream away life in.

And such was the home of Fenton Delamere, which he had inherited from his father, with three hundred faithful slaves to till its rich acres.

A man of stern presence, yet ever a most hospitable host and kind and loving father, Fenton Delamere, to those who watched him closely, seemed like a man who bore some hidden sorrow, which he jealously guarded, even from the eyes of his children.

A gentleman of the highest culture, one who had traveled much and read a great deal, he was most entertaining to his friends, and a kind master, he was beloved by his slaves.

In early life he had met, when North at college, a young girl who won his heart, and marrying her, he had brought her to his Southern home, and a year after an heir was born to his name and estate, a bright-eyed boy, strangely like his father.

Several years after a fair baby girl came into the household; but with her came a cloud of sorrow, for Mrs. Delamere lost her life in giving birth to her child, and was laid to rest in the family burying-ground in the magnolia forest, where slept two generations of Delameres, and the slaves of the plantation, upon whom death had laid his icy touch.

To her memory Fenton Delamere had reared the pretty Gothic chapel, and often was it his wont to spend hours there, playing upon the organ, for he was an accomplished musician, or reading some favorite book in the easy-chair of the vestry-room.

And this was the home into which grim Death was to stalk in all its ghastliness, and which the sin of gambling had wrested from its rightful heirs.

Upon the broad piazza, engaged in a piece of fancy embroidery, sat Gertrude Delamere, several days after the fatal duel among the live-oaks.

Clad in sunny white, with her wealth of red-gold hair looped up in a negligent but artistic manner, and her beautiful face serene and contented, it could be seen that the dread tidings had not reached her of that bitter and deadly scene in the moonlight.

Presently out upon the piazza strode a young man, booted and spurred, and dressed in a riding suit of white corduroys, and velvet coat, while a soft Panama hat was upon his head.

A glance into his dark, handsome face, yet unmarred by contact with the world, was sufficient to show that the Delamere blood flowed in his veins.

Young, for he was but twenty-one, well-formed, and with a face stamped with intellect and strong character, it was no wonder that Fenton Delamere loved his noble boy, just returned from Yale, as dearly as he did his beautiful daughter, and looked forward to their happiness in the future with the fondest hope.

But, a few days before, when he had gone to the city on business, he had been tempted to yield to the one great vice of his life, and had fallen, and bitter had been his fall, and heart-rending his anguish, as he felt that he must die, and leave ruin and sorrow upon those he had so idolized.

Little dreaming of that scene, Frank Delamere said gayly, as he came out upon the piazza:

"I am off for a gallop, sis; going over to Everton's for a visit, but will be back to tea. I sent Una to ask you to accompany me, and am sorry you cannot go."

"Thank you, brother, but I am anxious to finish this embroidery and have Dobson make up father's slippers before his return, and if he returns on Saturday it will be hard work," announced Gertrude, in her soft, musical tones.

"By Jupiter! sis, that reminds me of father's birthday anniversary coming upon Sunday; he will be just forty-five, and I must give him a present of some kind; so tell me what it shall be."

"Fred Parker has a pair of splendid deerhounds which father has had covetous eyes upon for some time, and Una said he is forced to sell them, as his fast life has run him deeply into debt."

"Then I shall ride by and purchase them for him; good-by, Get," and kissing her affectionately, Frank Delamere descended the broad steps, and mounted a thoroughbred mare, which a negro had just led round from the stables for him.

Away he dashed down the avenue toward the river road, and he was just disappearing from sight, in the forest above, when a young girl came out on the piazza, and said quickly:

"Missy Gertrude, the Natchez is running in to our landing."

The speaker was perhaps seventeen, and her darkly-bronzed face and jet-black, waving hair proclaimed her Quadroon blood.

Her form was slender and elegant, her face possessed a Spanish style of beauty, with large, dreamy eyes, that in anger would turn fiercely, and her dress was a neat and simple calico.

Looking quickly up, as her Quadroon maid spoke, Gertrude saw that a large steamer was coming in toward the Idlerest landing, as though to put off a passenger or freight.

"It cannot be my father, Una, for he was to remain a week in the city; but I suppose your anxiety to see Dan is so great you will be more disappointed than I am, if it should not be," said Gertrude pleasantly, and the Quadroon blushed at her words.

"Get the glass, Una, and see who lands," added Gertrude, still gazing at the boat.

The maid obeyed, and her mistress arranged the focus and turning it upon the steamer, said slowly:

"Yes, it is the Natchez, and she is backing off, after landing some one; yes, I see him now, and he is an old negro man, walking with a stick; now he turns into the avenue gate."

And Gertrude Delamere closed the glass, little dreaming what tidings were soon to strike like an arrow in her heart.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECRET CHAMBER.

I WILL now return to the dueling field, where I left the dead form of Fenton Delamere lying with upturned face in the moonlight, and Darkie Dan in the power of the two men who certainly meant him no good.

"Resist and you die, even if your dead master there said you were worth five thousand dollars," said Don Del Morte sternly, as the negro made a sudden movement, evidently to try the strength of his foes.

"I care not to be shot like a dog, gentlemen, so I will make no resistance," said Darkie Dan calmly.

"See that you do not; now, Carlyon, get one of the reins from my bridle and bind him," and, seeing a sudden flash of the eyes of his prisoner, as though he meant to try conclusions with him, when the other released his hold, the gambler added quickly:

"And to keep you from being too troublesome, take that!"

Like a flash the heavy pistol barrel, held in the strong hand of the King of Diamonds, fell upon the head of the negro, and like a log he dropped in his tracks.

"Now we will find him less troublesome, for he is as strong as a lion, and could have mastered us both, had he known his power: quick! Carlyon, let us bind him."

The young man hastened for the bridle-rein, and soon returning, the negro was securely bound, and then lifted into the buggy, in which he and his master had come to the fatal field.

"I will drive back, and you hold my horse, Carlyon, for the fellow is showing signs of recovering consciousness."

"Better gag him then, or he will call out to some one as we pass," suggested Carlyon.

"True, for though within sixty days he will be my slave, I care to have no trouble with him," and the King of Diamonds set to work, and with handkerchief securely gagged. Darkie Dan, who had recovered consciousness, and glared upon his enemies with intensest hatred.

"And the body?" asked Carlyon, less inured to crime than his older comrade.

"Ah! I had forgotten it; let me see what is best to be done; ah! you remain here, and I will send an officer out for it, and then you come directly to my rooms."

"Yes, it is best, for otherwise some one might rob him, and it would look bad for us, while, as he has been slain in a fair duel nothing can be done."

"True; now I will be off, and send aid to you as soon as possible," and Don Del Morte, without a second glance at the man he had slain, drove away from the spot, leaving Carlyon Norman pacing to and fro, and alternately glancing with a shudder at the upturned, pallid face so near him.

Driving into the more thickly settled part of the city the King of Diamonds drew up before a large house of ancient date, in the *Place d'Armes*, in the very heart of the French population of the town.

The *cafe*, or hotel, as it was called, stood on the corner with an entrance on each street, and an arched passageway through which a vehicle could pass into the *plaza*, or court in the rear.

Through this tunnel-like way the King of Diamonds drove, and halting his horse, motioned to Darkie Dan to alight, and silently the negro obeyed.

"Where did your master get this rig?" he asked, loosening the gag in the negro's mouth.

"From the St. Charles Hotel stables, sir," was the quiet response.

"Come, and if you cry out I shall kill you," was the stern order, and entering a dimly-lighted hallway the King of Diamonds led the way up a pair of stone stairs to a floor above.

A key let him into a room, on the right of the hall, and turning up a lamp that stood on

a center table, the light revealed a most luxuriously furnished sitting-room, with a door leading into a chamber beyond.

"Come!" and the gambler led the negro into the adjoining room, which was a bed-chamber, and furnished with the same luxurious taste and motioned him to sit down in a large and massive arm-chair.

Without a word Darkie Dan obeyed, and taking a long, strong rope, the King of Diamonds at once set about binding his captive to the chair, and in a short while had him so securely bound that it was impossible for him to move hand or foot, and the cruel gag was again put in use.

"I guess you will await my return," he said mockingly, and leaving the room he descended the stone stairs and entered a door on the right.

It was nearly two o'clock, but in a large wine-room a few keepers of late hours were still lingering over their drinks, while a Spanish-looking man with evil face stood behind the bar half asleep.

Approaching this person, who looked up and bowed politely, the gambler said:

"Jacot, I have just returned from an unpleasant affair, a duel, and I killed my man, and have driven into town in his buggy, which is in the Plaza.

"Take it to the St. Charles Hotel stables, and say to the proprietor that Mr. Fenton Delamere, the Mississippi Planter, has been killed in a duel, and now lies out at the field, and he will send for his body.

"Also let them know it at the St. Charles Hotel, where he stopped."

"Yes, Monsieur Del Morte; but allow me to congratulate you upon your safety," said the cabaret-keeper.

"Thank you, Jacot: but do not tarry, for these idlers here are not buying now."

"No, monsieur, they have not spent ten sous the past hour," and raising his voice he called out:

"Come, messieurs, it is late, and I must close my doors."

The idlers took the hint and departed, and the King of Diamonds said:

"Give me a bottle of your best wine, Jacot, and I will take it to my room to drive the cobwebs of thoughts unpleasant away."

"Yes, monsieur, here it is; now I am off, and if you need anything, ring the bell for Teresa, and she will hear you."

The cabaret-keeper then departed from his wine-room and Don Del Morte ascended the stone stairway once more and entered his own room, and began to pace to and fro, his face working with strong passions that crowded through his brain.

Turning suddenly, he took up the bottle of wine, and impatient of delay, knocked off the neck, and poured out a silver goblet full, and quaffed it without withdrawing it from his lips.

Then he threw himself into an easy-chair, and began mechanically to glance around the room, and upon its handsome furnishings, for the windows, as well as the doors, were hung with crimson velvet curtains, relieved by muslin drapery; a French divan was against the wall, inviting repose, and a *buffet*, glittering with glass and silver ware, stood between the windows, while articles of luxury were placed about as ornaments, *bric-a-brac* of all kinds stood on brackets, books were in profusion in carved hanging shelves, and over the marble mantle was a shrine of the Madonna, and the lamp, on the center-table, which was hidden beneath a richly-embroidered cover, was of burnished silver and in the shape of a cross.

Restlessly the eyes of the Gambler King fell upon these indications of a cultivated taste and a generous purse that were around him, and then were turned through the open door, where the heavily-curtained bed and drawing-room beyond were visible.

With a start, as though suddenly recalled to himself, he went into the bed-chamber, and crossing it, with but a cursory glance at the bound negro, he took from a chest of drawers a large key, and pulling aside a curtain, a window, seemingly, was revealed.

With a pressure of his hand he caused the window-sill to move, and a key-hole was visible, into which he placed the key in his hand.

Turning it, the sash moved slowly upward, and two shutter-like panels went back into the wall on either side, and dimly visible was a room beyond.

Lighting a wax candle, held in a silver stick, the Gambler King entered the room, which was bare of furniture, excepting a cot and a chair, and the walls were unbroken by window or door, other than that by which he had entered.

The roof was arched, and in the center was a light, protected by iron bars running across, and the dismal chamber seemed like a prison pen in which one might live and die without hope of succor from the outer world."

"Thanks to my investigating propensity, which caused me to ferret out this secret chamber, which even Jacot does not know the existence of, I have a safe place for Fenton Delamere's shadow," muttered the King of Diamonds, as he set the candle down and returned to his sleeping-room. "Well, Darkie Dan, we are to be neighbors, until I decide what I shall do with you, for our rooms adjoin, and if yours is not as comfortable as mine, it is safer," and he began to unbind the negro.

"Come, this is the way; ah! you do not seem struck with the furniture; now, that is what interests me, for I am confident it has been here for half a century, if not more, for see, the covering on this cot is but dust, when you touch it, and the wood is shrunken with age."

"But you shall have a blanket and a pillow, and I know can make yourself comfortable, though I must still keep your hands bound, as you are a dangerous man, Darkie Dan, and I am afraid of you."

Darkie Dan made no reply, but his look spoke volumes, and having thrown a blanket and pillow on the cot, the King of Diamonds returned to his own comfortable quarters, leaving the negro standing like a statue in the center of his prison.

Closing the secret doorway securely behind him, Don Del Morte entered his sitting room, just as there came a knock at the door, and opening it, Carlyon Norman stepped in and confronted him.

CHAPTER X.

SATAN AND HIS ALLY.

"WELL, Carlyon, what has been done?" and the King of Diamonds turned to the young man who had been his second in the fatal duel.

"Oh, it is all right; I simply reported to the officials that Mr. Delamere had fallen in a duel with the famous King of Diamonds, you know, and had come with only a slave as a companion, and I had acted as second for both gentlemen."

"That was right, Carlyon; but was the negro's absence commented upon?"

"The officer said the darky had doubtless gotten frightened, and I remarked that he had run off to the woods as soon as the sword combat began between my friends, for of course I pretended to be more intimate with Delamere than with you, and consequently more friendly toward him; but you must keep that negro in the background until you get possession of the estate, at the expiration of the time the notes were given for."

"Oh, he is safe: besides, a slave's testimony is not taken in court you know; but it's best to have him tell no ugly story about the affair, and if I cannot win him over by giving him his freedom and money, to serve me, why I shall simply end his life in some way."

"Bah! you talk as though taking human life was of no account," said the less hardened villain of the two.

"It does not trouble me; and I will protect myself, even if I had to remove you from my path."

The young man turned quickly toward him, and his face paled, seeing which the King of Diamonds added hastily:

"Do not misunderstand me, Carlyon; you know what we are to each other, and I merely named you, to show what extent I would go to, if driven to it; now let us decide upon some plan for the future."

"I suppose you are satisfied with the investment of your five thousand dollars?"

"More than I could have dreamed that I would be, for I have already realized in cash which you have given me, five times the amount I advanced, not to speak of the Delamere estate in which I hold half an interest."

"More than half an interest, my boy, as I did, for my revenge is satiated against Fenton Delamere, and that I held as worth more than

the gold, while you are to have the fair Gertrude for your wife."

"True, and she is exquisitely lovely, and I adored her the night I saw her at the grand masque ball the last night of the carnival."

"Well, you must win her if you can; if not, then you shall have control of the notes to force her to it, and, not knowing your connection with my affairs, she will not look upon you as a vile man, and sacrifice herself to save her brother from destitution, and herself from beggary."

"Do you know if she is already interested in any one?"

"I have heard that M. Leon Martelle, a wealthy young Creole here, is deeply interested in her, and he is a dangerous rival."

"Oh! I shall get rid of him in some way, now about the brother?"

"Frank Delamere?"

"Yes."

"Well, he is a dashing, handsome young fellow, for he came down on the same steamer with me some weeks ago, on his return from the North, where he has just graduated at Yale, and it may be necessary to get rid of him altogether."

"As how?"

"Why, Carlyon, don't be stupid: what happens a man whom you wish to rid yourself of?"

"You mean kill him?"

"Certainly, my boy; a little powder and ball, a knife in a strong hand, or poison, and he is fruit for the grave."

"And you think he will oppose me?"

"Not knowing you I suppose he will; my plan is to give you a letter of introduction to Frank Delamere, pretending to be from his father, for I can imitate his handwriting perfectly."

"You are to go to the plantation and make a visit, and remember, you are a young Kentuckian, an orphan, in fact kindredless, and having been left rich, you travel for amusement."

"Accident of course throws the notes of Fenton Delamere in your way, and you buy them, out of your friendship for Frank and Gertrude, and then the way is clear; once your wife, and she shall know whom she has married, and so shall Frank Delamere know who is his brother-in-law, and then there is but one thing to do with both of them, if they attempt to betray the secret."

"You certainly are an adept at plotting deviltry," said Carlyon Norman.

"Oh, yes! I have had practice; now, to-morrow evening the Natchez leaves for up the river, and will land you at Idlerest landing, and—"

"But I cannot go so soon, for it is nearly dawn now, and therefore it is *this* evening the steamer leaves."

"Then take the Shotwell the following day, and you had better, now I think of it, be the one to carry the body of Fenton Delamere home; it will help you there."

"Go to the hotel in the morning, pay his bill there, and also the undertaker's bill; play interested friend, for no one knows you here, and carry the body up with you on the Shotwell, and you can be one of the chief mourners at the funeral."

"Write Frank Delamere by the Natchez of his father's sad death, and say that you will follow with the loved remains, and my word for it all will go well."

"So be it, I will do as you say; now I will say good-night, or rather good-morning, for I need rest."

"Au revoir, my boy, and I too will seek rest," and Carlyon Norman departing. Don Del Morte disrobed himself and throwing himself upon his luxurious bed, was soon sleeping as sweetly as though no poor negro was suffering near him, no crime lay upon his conscience, and his hand had not taken the life of one who was to him—what?

CHAPTER XI.

TERESA THE MULATTRESS.

It was late when the King of Diamonds awoke from his sleep, and he stretched himself lazily, looked over at his gilded clock on the mantle, arose, and leisurely dressed himself.

Then he went to his secret chamber and found Darkie Dan stretched out upon the cot, but wide awake, and evidently suffering from his bonds, for his hands were swollen.

"Darkie Dan, I have no desire to punish you, or injure you just now, and not at all, if

you will serve me faithfully," he said pleasantly approaching the negro.

Darkie Dan arose to a sitting posture, and asked quickly:

"Do you mean that I am to serve you, sir, who killed my dear master?"

"Yes; I will give you your freedom—"

"I am no slave, sir: my master made me free when I saved Miss Gertrude from the wolves five years ago."

"Have you your freedom papers?"

"Sir?"

"Did he give you papers setting you free?"

"No, sir."

"Then you are still a slave, for he is dead and his word given you *then*, is worthless *now*," and a glitter of triumph came into the eyes of the gambler, while an ashen hue crept over the face of the negro, whose intelligence told him that Don Del Morte had spoken the truth.

"Oh, sir, my poor dead master never meant to wrong me so," he groaned.

"Well, he has wronged you, if he gave you no papers, and I now promise to not only put your freedom papers in your hand, but also to give you your value in gold, if you will swear to serve me as faithfully as you did him."

"I cannot, master."

"Cannot?"

"No, sir, I will not, for it would be a crime to him who is dead."

"Curse you! do you love him dead better than you do your freedom and gold?"

"If I get it by wrong-doing, yes, sir," was the frank response.

"And you refuse to serve me?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will, in sixty days, be your owner."

"I will be sorry, sir."

"I shall force you to serve me then."

"No, sir, for I have pledged my dead master to be true to my promise to him, and I cannot serve two masters, so the Good Book says."

"Curse you! no preaching to me: but I tell you, Darkie Dan, that you shall either serve me well, or I shall kill you."

The negro never flinched, and disappointed in not making him show fear, the gambler continued:

"I am going out now, Darkie Dan, but I shall return in a few hours with irons for your hands and feet, and if I do not bring you to terms by starvation, this room shall be your tomb."

Darkie Dan simply bowed, and the King of Diamonds wheeled on his heel and went out to a fashionable restaurant where he took his meals, and was soon enjoying an epicurean breakfast, unmindful of the fact that there was a very curious specimen of femininity in his elegant rooms.

This person with her bump of curiosity enlarged was Teresa, a mulattress, with fine dark eyes, glossy hair, and a voluptuous form, which was costumed with all the love for gay colors of her race.

Her mother had died when in the employ of Jacot, the *cabaret*-keeper, and Teresa, then but sixteen, had assumed her duties as house-keeper, and, a marvel of cleanliness, her rooms were kept in perfect order.

Hardly had the King of Diamonds left his rooms, when Teresa opened the door with her pass key, and entered to put them in order, for she loved to spend her spare time in the handsome rooms, looking at the objects of interest, and reading, for she was by no means a bad scholar, and, as the occupant was absent three-fourths of the time, she was seldom interrupted in her siesta on the divan, or in her poring over the fascinating books in Don Del Morte's library.

To set the sitting room in order was but the work of an instant, and then she went into the chamber, and her eyes fell upon a large key lying upon the table.

It was ill-shapen and rusty, and seemed out of place on that elegantly-embroidered cover, and the curious mulattress busied her brain to discover why such an *outre* thing was in the rooms of the fastidious gambler.

Presently her eyes fell upon the curtain drawn aside from the mock window, and approaching it, she observed that the sill was pushed back into the wall about three inches, and the space thus exposed had a large key-hole in it.

"Aha! there is a mystery here, which I will fathom, Monsieur Del Morte," she cried, delighted at having struck a trail that might prove of interest to her.

To the quick wit of Teresa it took but an

instant to comprehend the use of the large key on the table, and seizing it she thrust it into the lock, concealed by the bar beneath the window-sill, and turning it, the result startled her, for back into the wall upon either side moved the two supposed shutters.

With a half cry of alarm the girl started back, for the secret chamber was revealed to her astonished gaze, and upon the cot sat Darkie Dan.

Glancing at the door when he heard it opening, he now beheld, instead of the hated face of the King of Diamonds, that of a very pretty mulattress, and hope of escape sent the hot blood surging to his heart.

CHAPTER XII.

DARKIE DAN AND TERESA.

For full a moment neither the man or the girl spoke, and each eyed the other fixedly.

Then the mulattress asked, for she felt it devolved upon her to satisfy her curiosity to the full:

"Who are you?"

"An unfortunate slave," was the bitter response.

"What is your name?"

Now Teresa was not certain whether it mattered to her what was the name of the man, she found in the secret, but she knew not what else to ask.

"Darkie Dan, I am called: but my master gave me the name of Dan Dorcas, after my father and my mother," was the simple reply.

"Why are you here?" asked Teresa, returning to her catechism.

"Because I cannot help myself," was the sad response.

"Who brought you here?"

"A gentleman they call Don Del Morte," answered Darkie Dan, not forgetting his politeness even toward his bitter foe.

"A gentleman! Bah! he is no gentleman, if he does dress like one and wear diamonds fit for a prince: he is a gambler of the worst kind, and a bad man: though he gives me gold for caring for his room, I cannot help but say that," and Teresa gave a contemptuous toss of her head.

"I am glad that you do not like him, for you will the more readily help me, especially as we are of the same blood."

"You are a full blood negro."

"Yes, and you a mulattress."

"I am not a slave."

"I am."

"Ah me! I wish there were no slaves; but you are handsome, in spite of your black face, you talk well, and are like a gentleman, and I like you."

"I was raised by a gentleman, and with those of our blood it is like master like man."

"Why you talk like they do in the books I read in the King of Diamonds's room: oh, *Sacri!* If he should only come and catch me now, I believe he would kill me," and Teresa grew pale with alarm, and turned as if about to fly.

But a word from Darkie Dan recalled her, for he said pleadingly:

"And will you leave me here to die, for do you not see I am bound so tightly that the cords cut into my flesh?"

"Poor man; but did he do this?"

"If you mean Don Del Morte, yes."

"What had you done?"

"Nothing to him."

"Oh! you are a runaway slave and he caught you?"

"No."

"Then what did you do?" asked Teresa pettishly, for she had all the spoilt airs and mannerism of speaking of the French Creoles among whom she had been reared.

"I did him no harm; I saw him commit a crime, and he wishes to silence my tongue by death."

"But your word will not be taken, you being a slave."

"Alas! I know well how little a slave's testimony is worth in the courts; but those to whom I tell my sad story will believe me."

"Who are they?"

"My young master and mistress, who are as good and noble as was their dead father; will you not aid me to go to them, for they are in danger?"

"Of what?"

"Of worse than death."

"What can be worse than death? Ugh! you

make me shiver to speak of it, for I am terribly afraid to die."

"Then your heart should not let me die when you can help me."

"I dare not."

"Who do you fear?"

"The King of Diamonds."

"He need not know that you released me."

"But he will find it out."

"Not if I were doomed to die, and betraying you would save my life, would I tell."

"Ah! you are so nice."

"And you will save me?"

"How can I?" and Teresa looked cautiously back into the chamber.

"Get a knife and sever these cords."

"Oh! if he should catch me."

"Release my arms, and he shall never harm you," and a dangerous light flashed into the eyes of Darkie Dan.

"I believe I will," said Teresa, slowly.

"Please do."

She gazed into the dark, earnest eyes, and springing into the room next the secret chamber, soon returned with a pen-knife in her hand.

Having decided upon her course her wavering was wholly gone, and quickly she cut the bonds, and Darkie Dan was free.

Gladly he stretched his freed limbs, rubbed them, and swung his arms to and fro, to get back the lost circulation, and in a few moments felt that he was a match for the King of Diamonds, should he come upon him unarmed.

"Now you are free," said the mulattress, in a low tone.

"Yes, and I owe you my life," and his voice trembled.

"I am so glad; but now you must go, and let me close up this secret door, for I don't want to be around when the Don comes back, and I'll have to say *pater-nosters* for a month to make up for the lies I will tell, if asked about your escape."

"Good God!"

The cry broke from the lips of Darkie Dan.

And it was no wonder, for standing in the door of the bed-chamber was the King of Diamonds.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

HEARING the exclamation of Darkie Dan, and seeing his staring eyes, Teresa the Mulattress also looked quickly toward the door and beheld the pallid King of Diamonds.

With a cry of horror she tried to fly; but whither? for the way was barred by the man of whom she stood in such awe.

Seeing her act he sprung toward her, when turning, she darted past Darkie Dan into the secret chamber, while Don Del Morte ran in the direction of the bureau, upon which lay a large, silver-mounted revolver.

But Darkie Dan saw his intention, and like a tiger sprung upon him, and the two men grasped each other with savage, iron-like gripe, and the struggle for mastery was begun.

Had Darkie Dan engaged in a struggle with the King of Diamonds the day before, it would have been of hardly an instant's duration, for the negro possessed remarkable strength and endurance, while he was as agile as a panther and as quick in all his movements.

But the worry for his master, the sorrow for his death, the severe blow on his head from the pistol of Don Del Morte, and the night of sleepless suffering, with his limbs cramped and bound, had done much to unnerve him and to lessen his strength.

These things being considered, he was upon almost equal terms with the King of Diamonds, than whom there were few more powerful men.

Realizing that his threats had been sufficient to cause the negro to kill him, and the danger of his escape to all his plans, the King of Diamonds put forth all his energies to conquer him, while he cursed his ill-fortune in not having gone armed when he went out to his breakfast.

But Darkie Dan also knew the devil in the nature of the man he had to deal with, had heard his threat to kill him, and if not to have him for his slave, and that some plot was intended against Gertrude Delamere, while, if he allowed the Don to subdue him, poor Teresa would suffer by it, and he was determined to master him or die.

His head pained him severely, his heart held a heavy load of sorrow, his limbs were torn with pain, and the struggle was agony to him;

but he heeded not his ailments, and by a mighty effort forced the King of Diamonds into the secret chamber, where the flooring was of heavy stones, and would give back no sound as did the wooden floor of the bed-chamber.

Once in this prison pen, and hot and fierce raged the combat, loud panted the contestants, and heavily their feet trod the floor.

In silence, except their hard drawn breathing and tramping of feet, they fought on, clutched tightly together, while poor Teresa lay in a swoon upon the floor, unconscious of the death-struggle.

At last the sinewy form of the negro began to tax the muscles of the white man beyond endurance, and Darkie Dan got his gripe upon the throat of the gambler.

Tighter and tighter he clutched it, until the bone and flesh seemed crushed in his strong hand, and only a gurgling, strangling sound came from the mouth and nostrils of his enemy.

At last the clasp of the King of Diamonds gave way, his face became blue-black and blotched, his tongue protruded and his eyes seemed bursting from their sockets, and Darkie Dan, now able to look upon the visage so near his own, threw the limp form from him with a half cry of horror.

Staggering across the room he raised Teresa the mulattress in his arms, carried her into the bed-chamber and laid her upon a sofa.

Then he returned to the portal of the secret room, and the rusty key still in the window sill, told the story of how the girl had gained ingress.

Glancing across the room, he saw that the King of Diamonds still lay upon the stone floor where he had flung him, and seemed as though life had forever left his body, and, with a shudder he turned the key, and back into place came the sliding shutters, or doors.

Then he removed the key, drew the sill back into place, and turning toward the sofa, beheld Teresa just awaking to consciousness.

"Oh! what has happened? Have I been dead, or am I alive?" cried the frightened girl, springing to her feet.

"You are safe, but you must leave here."

"Oh! I remember; you are the handsome negro I rescued, and the King of Diamonds came in and caught us," she said in a frightened way.

"Yes."

"And where is he?"

"He left the room."

"Sanctissima! then I must go too."

"Yes, go with me, for it is best."

"Marry you? Oh! how forward you are," and the dark eyes opened wide.

"You misunderstand me; I asked you to go with me, for here you will not be safe!"

"Where?"

"I will find you a hiding place in a Quadroon family I know in town, until I ask my young missy to give you a home, and I know she will."

"I would like it, for this life is not a pleasant one."

"Then you will leave here?"

"Yes, if you tell me where to go."

"I will accompany you."

"Wait until I get some trinkets I have; and can I carry a pretty yellow silk I have, and which I bought with my earnings?"

"No; I have money for you to buy one in the place of it; but hurry, or harm may yet befall us; I will wait here."

Teresa, yet greatly alarmed, and anxious to retreat before the return of the King of Diamonds, hurried from the room, and in five minutes returned with a little bundle.

Closing the door of Don Del Morte's room, they descended the stone stairs, and the next moment stepped out of the hall door upon the *banque*, and walked quickly down the street.

With the *cabaret* of Jacot shut out by the next corner, both Darkie Dan and the mulattress breathed more freely, and a cab, which had just deposited a load at the *cite carcel*, passing, Darkie Dan hailed it, and aiding Teresa into it, ordered the *coche* to drive to a certain street in an obscure part of the town, and where dwelt his Quadroon friends.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PASSENGER FROM THE NATCHEZ.

"Do you recognize who it is, Una?" asked Gertrude Delamere, addressing the Quadroon, as the old negro, who had landed from the steamer Natchez, came slowly up the avenue leading to Idlerest.

"I don't know him, missy," answered Una, watching the approaching stranger with all a woman's curiosity, whether she be African, Caucasian or Indian.

Coming up to the stone steps of the mansion, he halted, leaning on his stick, and Gertrude saw what appeared to be an old man, for his hair was white, his face furrowed and his form bent, and he seemed to hang heavily upon his stick.

"How do, missy? would like to see missy if she will talk to poor ole nigger," he said with deference.

"Certainly, Uncle,* what have you to say? but sit down, for you look tired."

"Ah! missy, I am tired here," and he put his hand on his heart, while, suddenly coming up the steps at a pace that surprised both Gertrude and Una, he continued:

"Missy Gertrude, forgive me for coming before you this way; but oh! missy! missy! I have bad, bad news to tell you."

In an instant Gertrude Delamere was upon her feet, and from her lips broke the name:

"Darkie Dan!"

"Yes, missy, I am Dan," was the sad response.

"And my father?" and Gertrude spoke in a voice that was hardly above a whisper, while her face turned deadly pale.

"Missy, let me tell you to be strong to bear what I have to tell, for—"

"Speak! Dan, what of my father?" and Gertrude's voice was unnaturally calm.

"Missy Gertrude, your poor father is dead."

A low moan, like the plaintive note of a dove, broke from Gertrude's lips, and though both Dan and Una sprung toward her, she sunk on the piazza in a swoon.

Instantly all was excitement in the mansion: servants were dispatched on fleet horses for the family physician and for Frank Delamere, and wailing resounded through the halls and in the cabins, for the master was dearly loved.

And in the midst of their grief for the dead master, and anxiety at Gertrude's remaining unconscious, in spite of all that Una and old Mammy Deborah could do to restore her, no one noticed that one of the up river boats had put in to the bank and landed two men. Up to the mansion they came, and suddenly, as Darkie Dan came out upon the piazza, his disguise all awry, he started back as two revolvers covered him, and a stern voice said:

"This is the man, Deluth?"

"Yes; you see he is disguised."

"Well, my man, you are wanted in New Orleans," said the first speaker.

"I am needed here, sir, just now, for my master is dead, and my young missy very ill, while her brother is away from home," said Darkie Dan quietly.

"Others must look after her and attend to the dead, for you go with us."

"Will you not wait, gentlemen, until Master Frank comes?"

"No, for we saw the smoke of a descending steamer as we landed, and will catch it back to the city."

"But Master Frank will soon be here," pleaded Darkie Dan.

"We cannot wait; come!"

"Of what do you accuse this man?" suddenly said a stern voice, and Frank Delamere, who had ridden up the back way, and whom Una had told of what had occurred to Dan, stepped out upon the piazza.

"Are you Mr. Delamere sir?" asked one of the men politely.

"I am."

"We are officers of the law."

"Well, what do you want here?"

"Is not this man known as Darkie Dan?"

"He is."

"Then we arrest him for murder."

"Murder! no, no, he cannot be guilty of murder," cried Frank Delamere.

"He has committed murder in the city, and he must return with us."

"Speak! Dan, what means this charge?" said Frank Delamere, earnestly.

"Oh, Master Frank, I do not know what to say."

"Is it true, Dan?"

"You see he has been disguised, sir."

"Yes, and I cannot understand it."

"The truth will all come out, Master Frank; it will all come out some day," and Darkie Dan spoke dejectedly, and before more could

* All old negroes in the South are called "Uncle" and "Auntie," according to their sex.—THE AUTHOR.

be said one of the officers took him by the arm, and ordered sternly:

"Come! we will miss that steamer if we tarry longer; the boy will have fair trial, Mr. Delamere, and if you wish to see him, you will find him in the *cite carcel*."

"Good-by, Master Frank."

"Good-by, Dan," and Frank Delamere grasped the outstretched hand and turned quickly away, while poor Una, the Quadroon, wailed piteously as she saw Darkie Dan ironed and led down toward the river, where the boat coming down-stream was hailed, and putting in to the landing, carried the officers and their prisoner to New Orleans.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEAD AND THE LIVING.

WHEN Frank Delamere turned away with a full heart, at Dan's arrest for a crime so foul, it was his half-formed intention to immediately get ready and accompany him to New Orleans, for he could not believe that the negro was guilty of murder.

But he had just arrived, and coming by a path through the forest, his horse having gone lame in leaping a ditch, which caused him to return home, he had not met the messengers dispatched in search of him, and knew not the awful tidings that awaited him.

The wailing of the negroes he attributed to the unfortunate situation, which Darkie Dan had gotten himself into, for he knew that the young man was dearly loved by all on the plantation.

"Cheer up, Una, for I think there must be some sad mistake, and Dan shall have full justice; but did he run away and leave my father in the city?" said Frank Delamere, to his sister's Quadroon maid, who had left Gertrude to the care of old Auntie Deborah, while she came to see what would be Darkie Dan's fate.

"Oh, Master Frank, your poor father is dead!"

"Dead!"

The news struck Frank Delamere as a blow from a club, and he staggered back and leaned against the door.

"Father dead, and Dan arrested as a murderer! What does this mean, Una?" he gasped, rather than said.

"I dunno, Master Frank; I dunno, sir."

"Where is my sister?"

"She has fainted, sir, and Auntie Deborah is with her."

Frank heard no more, but bounded toward his sister's room.

Gertrude had just recovered consciousness, and threw herself into her brother's arms, while she cried pitifully:

"Oh, Frank! Brother! what does it all mean?"

"Gertrude, I know nothing excepting what I have heard from Una, that our father is dead, and Dan has been arrested as his murderer."

"No, no, that cannot be; father is dead, I fear—I know it now, for something here tells me so—but Dan never killed him."

"It may have been an accident, Gertrude, and the trial will show, I feel confident, that Dan never intentionally killed father."

"Oh, brother! there is some sad mistake; but what are we to do?"

"I shall go to the city by the first boat down, and—"

"Don't leave me here, brother, or I should die; take me with you, I implore."

"Certainly you shall go; here, Una, get Miss Gertrude's things ready, and I will put some one on watch to hail the next boat," and Frank Delamere left the room.

And all that afternoon and night a watch was kept, but only one boat went down, and that one a "stern-wheeler" from the Ohio and it refused to answer the hail from the shore, although a score of slaves were waving pine torches for her to come in to the bank, and Frank Delamere and his sister stood at the landing, awaiting to go on board.

It was a weary night of watching, and just at sunrise, as no smoke was visible over the point, where a boat could be seen twenty five miles above, Frank Delamere called to Gertrude to accompany him to the house for breakfast, and the party, for half a dozen neighboring planters had ridden over to offer their sympathy, were returning to the mansion, when a negro boy called out:

"Boat comin' up, Masser Frank."

All eyes were at once turned down the river, and leveling his spy-glass, which he had with him, Frank Delamere said:

"It is the Shotwell, and she is ahead of her usual time; now we will get news, I hope."

Rapidly the splendid steamer came on up the river, a wall of foam running back from each bow, and suddenly her deep-toned bell began to toll, and a planter said:

"Her flags are at half-mast, Frank."

"Yes, the Shotwell doubtless carries the body of my father; see, she is putting in toward the landing."

A breathless silence now fell upon the little group, while the steamer slackened speed, and came on slowly, her bell tolling, her flags at half-mast, and a group of passengers gathered forward on the lower deck.

Nearer and nearer, until the heavy line was thrown out and made fast, the gang-plank shoved off to the bank, and slowly and with measured tread, a party of passengers, who knowing the dead planter, had volunteered as pall bearers, moved shoreward.

Before the coffin walked a young man with saddened face, and ascending the bank he was met by Frank Delamere.

"Mr. Delamere, I believe?" said the young man politely.

"Yes, sir."

"My name is Carlyon Norman, and, as a friend of your father I have brought his body home, for I see that you know of his sad end."

"Only that he is dead, sir; but you are welcome to Idlerest, though from my heart I wish that you had come under happier auspices.

"Gertrude, this is Mr. Norman, our father's friend; my sister, Mr. Norman."

Gertrude extended her hand, but uttered no word, for her heart was too full, and the planters present having relieved the steamer's passengers of their load, the cortege moved slowly toward the mansion.

It was a sad procession there in the early morning, with the dew still on the grass, the birds chirping in the trees, eight planters, bare-headed, carrying the massive casket with its dead, the son, daughter, and friend (!) of Fenton Delamere following close behind with bare heads, the rear brought up by the negroes who had been on watch during the night on the river bank, the slaves from the "quarters" forming a lane, for they stood on either side of the avenue, silent, uncovered, and with full hearts, and the majestic steamer, slowly stemming the current, and sending back the sympathy of her passengers and crew, through the deep-toned notes of her tolling bell.

And yet, Carlyon Norman walked amid those who loved the dead, gazed upon the impressive scene, and was plotting ruin and sorrow for the name of Delamere in the future.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BRACE OF VILLAINS.

WHEN the two officers who arrested Darkie Dan, took the steamer at Idlerest landing, one of them went to the captain and told him that it was necessary for him to return up the river, and to keep a bright watch for the Shotwell, and bring her to with signals, so that he might board her.

As the man offered to pay the captain for his trouble, and was an officer of the law, of course there could be no refusal of his request, and consequently that night the Shotwell was signaled, and coming alongside a passenger from the steamer going down boarded her.

Going to the office he paid his fare up to Vicksburg, was assigned a state-room, and then leisurely sauntered about the cabin and guards, until suddenly he came face to face with a person who seemed to recognize him, and who said in a low tone:

"My state-room is No. 10, the door is unlocked that opens on the guard; come in there!"

The two separated then, and five minutes after sat together in No. 10.

"Well, what did you do?" asked the occupant of No. 10.

"When you told me that a murder had been committed, and that the man would start for the plantation where he lived, I at once went to watching the boats that were leaving for up the river, and my pard came to me and said that a negro had left on the Natchez, who had a queer look he thought, for he was apparently an old man; but a child falling overboard he had sprung into the river and saved him with a strength a person of his seeming age could not have possessed; soon after the Natchez left, and after som' talk together, we concluded to go to the plantation and wait there to nab him, and so informed you, as you know.

"Well, we took a steamer up and arrived at Idlerest a short time behind the Natchez, and caught our man, who was really the pretended old negro, and before he could do any damage, though he had told of his master's death.

"The young master was away, it seems, and the young lady fainted at the news, so we got him before any harm was done, and caught the next boat down, and while my pard has him in irons on his way to the city, here I am to report to you."

"You are certain that the people at Idlerest do not suspect anything against me?"

"Sure."

"You are convinced that the negro made no charges against me?"

"Not one; he had merely told of his master's death, when the lady fainted, and we arrested him while she was yet in a swoon, and his disguise helped our charge against him."

"Good! and your comrade has gone on to New Orleans?"

"Yes, he will carry the fellow to the *cabaret*, as you ordered, and give him into the hands of Jacot."

"Well, here is some money for you, and upon my return, if the negro is there safe, I will pay you the sum agreed upon for doing your work so well."

"Oh! I can play constable well, as Don Del Morte knows, for I have worked for him before, and my pard is as precious a rascal as I am," said the pretended officer, for such the reader now knows him to be, and with evident pride in his criminal skill.

"I don't doubt it; but I will not condemn you for that which has done me good service, and you shall be well paid; now go to your state-room, and remember, if we do not arrive at Idlerest until late in the morning, do not recognize me."

"Oh no, I never saw you before of course; good-night, sir, and I am obliged for this little forerunner of more to come," and the villain slipped out of the state-room leaving Carlyon Norman to his own meditations.

After a moment of silent thought, he muttered half aloud:

"By Heaven! but Don Del Morte had a close call of it that time, and, had he not known the secret spring, which opened that queer chamber from the inside, he would have died, as he was nearly gone when I found him on the floor of his sitting-room.

"Well, Darkie Dan will fare badly when he gets in his power, and if he does not pray for death, before it comes to him, then I know nothing of the cruel tortures that man can devise.

"Ah me! I am in the current and must go with it, not strive to swim against it; so heart be still with thy conscientious prickings, and face put on the mask of sorrow and virtue.

"In a few hours now the boat will be at Idlerest landing, and then I must play well my part, for a single mistake may ruin all, and I have sworn that sweet Gertrude Delamere shall be my bride, and Don Del Morte has taken solemn oath to make me the owner of the Delamere estates, and bring ruin upon them, and shame upon their name.

"Great God! how that man hates those of the Delamere blood, and visits upon the children the sins of the fathers.

"I wish I could go to sleep; but I must not, for I must look a little haggard in the morning, to show how I too have suffered for my dear friend, the master of Idlerest," and lighting a cigar, Carlyon Norman left his state-room, and went forward, where on the guard, covered with a dark pall, was the casket that contained the body of Fenton Delamere.

And, through the following hours he paced to and fro, until the tolling of the bell announced that Idlerest was in sight, and the sympathizing passengers began to gather around the coffin that was soon to rest in the grave.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FALSE FRIEND.

IN the burying-ground of his family, on the spot he had selected, Fenton Delamere was laid in his grave, and the vast concourse of sorrowing friends wended their way homeward, for now they knew how sad had been the end of the wealthy Planter.

Carlyon Norman, the supposed friend, had told his sad story of the Planter's quarrel with the King of Diamonds, whom many knew to their sorrow, and that a duel had followed,

and Fenton Delamere had fallen by the hand of Don Del Morte.

Back to Idlerest Manor went Frank Delamere, pale, and with a look of determination upon his face, and his sister, sad, but resigned, leaned on his arm, while their honored guest, Carlyon Norman, accompanied them.

And the night following the funeral, sitting in the handsome library, Frank and Gertrude Delamere heard, in the honeyed tones of their guest, the full story of the gambling scene on the steamer, the duel that followed, and knew that the King of Diamonds held their father's notes against all they were worth in the world.

"Is there no way that these notes can be redeemed, brother, before they come to maturity?" asked Gertrude.

"I see no way, Gertrude; they cover the entire inheritance our father has left us, as I understand it, and I have no means to meet them, and know not whom to call on."

"Cannot the notes be broken by law, being gambling debts?" suggested Carlyon Norman, cunningly feeling his way.

"No, sir!" was the stern response; "for if my father gave his notes for a debt, his name shall not be dishonored, but they shall be paid, if they take every dollar from my sister and myself; but that does not prevent me from paying a debt I consider that I owe."

"What do you mean, Frank?" asked Gertrude, struck by his strange and earnest manner.

"I mean, Get, that a blackleg has swindled my father of his riches, and then taken his life, and that he has me to settle with."

"Oh, brother! would you meet that man as you threaten?" cried Gertrude, in alarm.

"I know not what I shall do yet, sis; but rest assured I shall act for the best, for your good and mine; but I must go to New Orleans, soon, and see what can be done."

"Though I have only met you and your sister, Mr. Delamere, I knew your father quite well, and I ask, as his friend, and yours, to permit me to act in this matter," said Carlyon Norman.

"But what would you do, my dear friend?"

"First, I will return to New Orleans and buy up the notes for you."

"But, as I have just said, I have nothing with which to buy them."

"But I have."

"You!"

"Yes, I possess a most generous bank account, my dear sir, and shall be more than happy to use it in your behalf."

"My dear Norman, I could never accept such a kindness at your hands, for already are we under obligations to you for your kindness to father, which I can never repay," and Frank stretched forth his arm, little dreaming that it was grasping in friendship the hand of a man who was as the adder in the bosom.

"I insist upon taking up these notes, my dear friends."

"Why, they cover half a million, you say, and it would be twelve years before they could be paid off by the receipts of the plantation."

"Never mind; I have my money so as to use it; and I can buy the notes for much less than their face calls for, I am confident; at any rate I can but try, and I will take the steamer down in the morning, and soon return, I hope, with good news."

To say that Frank Delamere and Gertrude were deeply touched by the disinterested kindness of their new-found friend, would be to put it lightly; they were overcome with gratitude, and the pretended Kentuckian went to his sumptuous room that night, gloating over the success of his plans to become the master of Idlerest, and bring ruin and shame upon those who treated him as an honored guest.

After an early breakfast the following morning Carlyon Norman took the steamer for New Orleans, refusing to allow Frank Delamere to accompany him, saying it was his duty to remain and comfort his sister, and promising to do all in his power for poor Darkie Dan, against whom lay the charge of murder.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BURIED ALIVE.

THE elegant rooms of the King of Diamonds were darkened, and there rested upon them the silence and air of a sick-chamber, for in the curtained bed lay the form of the occupant, and in an easy-chair, dozing away, as nurses always do, sat an attendant.

"What time is it?" suddenly asked a hoarse voice, from the curtained bed.

Starting up to wakefulness the nurse glanced at the clock, and replied:

"It is seven o'clock, sir."

"Then I should have some news this evening," and Don Del Morte settled himself back to rest, while the nurse returned to his dozing.

Presently a knock came at the door and the nurse was once more disturbed.

It was Monsieur Jacot, the keeper of the cabaret, and he wished to speak with Don Del Morte.

"Well, Jacot, what news?"

"A close carriage is in the court, sir, and he is reported to be in it."

"Satan be praised; send the nurse off on some errand, and you bring up the prisoner, and I will direct you how to open the secret chamber—curses on his gripel it pains me fearfully to speak."

Jacot obeyed, by dispatching the nurse to a distant part of the city, to fetch a certain doctor, and leaving the room, he soon returned, leading a man whose ankles were chained together, whose hands were ironed, and in whose mouth was a leather gag.

Quietly he led him to the bedside of the invalid, and Don Del Morte arose on his elbow and glanced at the ironed man.

It was Darkie Dan, and he started back, raising his manacled hands, as if to ward off a phantom, for he could utter no word.

"Ah! you believed you had killed me, did you? Well, you see I die hard; but I will see what you can stand. Jacot!"

"Yes, monsieur."

"On that table lies a heavy key."

"Yes, here it is."

"Do you see yonder curtain?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Draw it back."

"It is done."

"Press hard on the left end of that mock window-sill."

"Ah! it slides back," cried Jacot.

"You see a key-hole?"

"Yes, and the key turns in the lock—oh!—mon Dieu! the shutters slide back—Holy Mother! there is a room—why, monsieur, I am renting you three rooms, and only getting pay for two."

"Oh! you shall have your pay as you know. Now, Darkie Dan, you go back to your old quarters once more, and remember, in that room you die!"

Darkie Dan shuddered slightly, but his face remained calm.

"Curse you! I say you die in that room, for this man will not save you, as he is my tool, my slave, as you are, to do my bidding."

Darkie Dan yet remained unmoved, and Don Del Morte continued:

"Not one morsel of food, not one drop of water shall pass your lips, and inch by inch you shall die, and your groans, if I could hear them, would be music to my ears."

"But you cannot cry out, for that gag remains in your mouth, and for your crime against me you shall die, die, die!"

The cruel man fell back upon his pillow utterly prostrated; but after a while he regained his strength and said:

"See, your finger-marks yet remain upon my throat, and yet I have this joy, that ere they are gone you will be carrion in yonder room. Jacot!"

"Oui, monsieur."

"Lead this man into yonder room—his tomb!"

"Yes, Don Del Morte," and the willing tool obeyed.

Down upon the cot, where he had before passed such hours of utter wretchedness, sunk the brave man, and to his ears came the grating sound of the shutters sliding back into place.

Then came silence like that that haunts the grave, for no sound came from the adjoining room, and only now and then he heard the faintest rumbling, as some vehicle drove rapidly along the stone pave.

"Yes, that man meant what he said; he has left me here to die of starvation," were the thoughts that flashed through the busy brain of Darkie Dan.

"But must I die? No! I made a solemn pledge to master to save his children, and if I do not keep it, it will be because I die here in this room."

"My tomb, he called it; well, we shall see," and a strange light shone in the eyes of Darkie Dan.

CHAPTER XIX.

A HARD STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM.

WHEN Darkie Dan had pondered for some time, and then uttered the words:

"My tomb, he called it! well we shall see," he seemed to have come to some sudden determination, for he arose from his sitting position, and lay down upon his face, his full length upon the cot.

Bending his head over, he worked away until he got one of the projecting ends of the cot under the leather strap that held the gag in his mouth.

It is true the effort scraped the skin off his face, where it came in contact with the wood; but what did he care, for he felt not the pain.

Then, bracing himself firmly upon his manacled arms, he raised upward with all his strength.

It was a tremendous strain; the veins stood out like whip-cords, his eyes fairly started from their sockets, yet still he kept up the tremendous pressure, until at last, with a snap, the leather parted, and the gag fell from his bleeding mouth.

"Thank God!"

It was all he could say, and he sunk exhausted upon the cot, and for a long while lay motionless.

Then, he arose to work once more, and, after numerous ineffectual attempts got out of his sleeve, where it was concealed, a small package which he opened, and took out three files.

It was quite dark in his prison, for only a few rays of moonlight penetrated through the skylight overhead; but lying on his back, he took one of the files firmly in his strong teeth, and began to move his hands slowly back and forward, pressing the iron manacle of his right wrist against it.

For hours he worked steadily; but at length, utterly worn out, he sunk to sleep, and awoke to discover the daylight filling his prison.

He had no toilet to make, no breakfast to dispose of, and so at once set to work once more, while he was delighted to see that he had filed half-way through the iron.

Several hours again passed away, and, in spite of his aching teeth and jaws, he kept on, and at last was enabled to free his right arm.

A gleam of triumph shot into his eyes, as he held his freed arm on high; but without losing any time he began on the iron that held his left hand in durance vile.

With the right hand he could work more rapidly than with his teeth, and as the shadows darkened in his room, he arose from his cot, both arms free.

Taking up the manacles, he shook them toward the secret door, and said savagely:

"If you were to come here now, Don Del Morte, no power on earth could prevent my killing you."

Resuming his seat on his cot once more he leaned over and began the slow work of filing the irons from his feet.

The position caused the blood to rush to his head and he had frequently to stop, while he was weakened from hunger, and his mouth was parched; but still he persevered, and when the sun again rose and cast its bright rays into the room, he had freed one ankle.

Cheered by his success he bent every energy to his work now, and by noon he sprung to his feet with a cry of joy, for he was a free man, as far as his irons went.

But how was he to escape from those four walls? for, did he attempt to tear away the secret doors, and to do so seemed impossible, he would rouse Don Del Morte, and a bullet would then and there end his career.

Carefully he looked around the room, and then raised his eyes to the skylight, for there seemed his only way of egress.

But stout iron bars there met his gaze, forming a grating that seemed imbedded in the roof on either side.

After a long meditation, Darkie Dan seemed to have decided upon a plan, for he arose, took up the blanket which Don Del Morte had thrown to him when he was first a prisoner there, and taking out his pen-knife, cut long strips about a quarter of an inch in width.

These he tied together, and then one end was fastened around the files, and he began to toss them up at the iron grating.

A few throws, and at length it went through one of the iron squares, which was about six inches in diameter, and falling on the other side of a bar, hung there.

Lightening up on the string he held in his hand, the weight of the files drew it over un-

til he grasped the files, and then the blanket was cut in four strips to serve in the place of a rope.

With the aid of the string he drew the four strips, which he tied firmly together, over a bar of the grating, and he had a rope by which he could ascend.

Going up, hand over hand, he clung to the grating with one hand, while with the other he fastened the other end of his blanket-rope in such a way that it served as a swinging seat.

Into this he quickly ensconced himself and began work with the files upon the stout bars of iron.

It was a long and tedious work, but he persevered untiringly, and shortly after dark the first bar was filed through.

Without a moment's rest he began on the other next to it, and though his files were wearing away did not despond.

By midnight a second bar was severed, and the third and last gave way just before dawn.

Pressing his massive shoulders against one side of the grating, he bent it up far enough for his head to pass through; but in forcing it wider open his great pressure upon his blanket swing caused it to give way, and ere he could catch himself, he fell heavily to the stone flooring sixteen feet below him, and lay there motionless.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DEATH-DOCTOR.

STUNNED by his fall, Darkie Dan lay for a long time unconscious; but at length life's pendulum came swinging slowly back, and the eyes opened to see the glare of day, for rays of sunlight fell upon the glass skylight.

With an effort the negro staggered to his feet, racked with pain in head and body, his mouth parched, and a gnawing of hunger that was intense, yet not despondent.

His was no nature to despair while a germ of hope remained.

Yet what could he do?

The end of the blanket was far above his reach, and he looked around in vain for something else that would be strong enough to uphold his weight.

Sitting down upon the cot, he began to meditate, as was his wont, and suddenly a gleam of triumph shot through his eyes, and quickly he arose, to his feet, though every movement was torture.

Off then came his coat, and his shirt followed, and the latter was the object to work on.

Into long strips he cut it, and these he carefully braided together, until at last he had another long, stout line.

The files then came into requisition once more, and a score of efforts succeeded in throwing them over the iron grating again, and the two ends were drawn down even. Then he drew on his coat, took a long, grim glance around his room, and once more began the ascent, just as darkness came on to cast his prison chamber in gloom.

Slowly he went upward, for it took every atom of strength he had left, and reaching the grating he wrapped his rope around him, and once more repaired the broken blanket bands.

Into this he then clambered, and, after another effort raised the grating so that he could pass through it.

Once on the upper side, and he drew up the means of escape, pushed the grating back into place, and said grimly:

"He'll think the devil has stolen me, when he comes in to see me if I am dead."

He was now under the skylight, a glass projection over the grating, and to his delight he found that the slats, which were an inch apart, to give air to the occupant of the room below, could be shoved from their place by slight pressure.

This he quickly did, and crawling out, found himself upon a rounding roof covered with tiles.

Carefully replacing the slats he took up his blanket and shirt ropes and went to the edge and looked over.

It was fifty feet to the alley below, for the rear of the mysterious chamber was upon a narrow passageway leading to the inner court of the ancient and rambling old building in which Jacot had his home.

Glancing around him, for some other means of escape, Darkie Dan saw wings, roofs and wall rising on all sides above him, but no other

way was open to him, so he, without loss of time sat down to make another rope, and again the pieces of blanket came into use, and were cut into long strips and braided.

It was midnight before his task was completed; but at last, with a chuckle of triumph, he arose, took out two of the slats and slipped the rope around the grating, and then let the ends fall over into the alleyway.

Raising them, and letting them fall quickly, he heard the files, which he had attached to the end, strike the ground, and he knew that he had well calculated the distance.

Then he cautiously let himself over the edge of the roof and began to descend slowly.

Hand under hand he went, until at last his feet touched *terra firma* and he could hardly resist a wild cry of delight.

But pulling on one end of his rope, which had stood him in such need, he soon drew it from around the grating, and coiling it carefully, said half-aloud:

"I'll give this to Una as a keepsake."

Then he moved cautiously out of the alley, and was soon after hastening along the Rue Royale, as if he had some defined object in view.

Seemingly well acquainted with the city, he hastened on, now almost forgetting his long fast and sufferings, and, after a walk of half an hour halted in front of an old-fashioned one-story and attic stuccoed house in the *Quadroon quartier* of the town.

The shutters were closed, and no answer coming to his rap upon the door, he passed through the little gate at the side, for it was the home of Una's mother, whom Fenton Delamere had set free years before for faithful services, and he knew the place well.

A shutter, overlooking the garden was open, and a dim light was visible within one of the back rooms, and Darkie Dan put aside the rose-bushes and peered cautiously in.

That it was a sick-room was evident, for a man was bending over a bed on which was a prostrate form, and near by stood an elderly mulattress, who was Elsie, the owner of the little home, and Una's mother.

Darkie Dan saw the man, whom he took for the doctor, pour a powder in a glass, and place it to the lips of the invalid, whose face he could not see.

Then the man turned, and Darkie Dan started, for he recognized the man who had arrested him at Idlerest and brought him in irons back to New Orleans to place in the power of Don Del Morte.

He was dressed in black, wore spectacles, and had a professional look thus disguised, but it was the same man he knew.

"I will know why he comes here," he muttered, and he started around to the front door to watch his departure, and dog his steps to his home.

The man soon passed out, and glancing cautiously up and down the street, walked rapidly away to the next corner, where a cab awaited him.

Springing into this he was driven back toward the heart of the city, at a pace which Darkie Dan, in his weakened condition could not follow, so he gave up the pursuit, and once more returned to Elsie's home.

A rap at the door was now answered by the Quadroon, and she started back at sight of her visitor, crying:

"Lordy! Lordy! boy, I thought they had killed you."

"No, Auntie Elsie, they haven't killed me, though they tried to; but I am nearly starved, sick and miserable, so please give me some food, and let me have rest."

"You looks like a black ghost, boy, and your eyes is so deep sunken, they is rollin' against the back of yer skull; sit down, boy, and I'll soon have you all right; but tell me, what did they do with you, for I read a piece in the papers about poor master's funeral, and that his faithful body-servant, Darkie Dan, meaning yourself, honey, had been arrested for murder."

"It is a long story, which I cannot tell you now, auntie; but have you kept Teresa safe, as I asked you?"

"Poor honey, she has kept herself safe, for since you left she has been very sick; the fright was too much for her."

"You called in a doctor, Auntie Elsie, didn't you?"

"One called himself in, Dan; he is a nice gentleman too."

"Called himself in?" asked Dan in surprise.

"Yes, honey; he stopped one day and had a

talk with me; said he was sorry I suffered with rheumatism, for I told him, you know, and he would bring something to help it, and he did.

"He said he was a doctor, and I asked him in to see the girl, but he hasn't done her any good, for she is still sick."

"And he has just left here, hasn't he, Auntie Elsie?"

"Yes, boy."

"That man is a fraud; he is one of the two who arrested me, and he is just spying round; come, I must see Teresa," and Darkie Dan sprung to his feet, crossed the room, and entered the chamber where he had seen the invalid lying in bed.

One glance, one touch of her hand, and he sprung back in horror, crying:

"Oh! Auntie Elsie, she is dead, and that man has poisoned her!"

CHAPTER XXI.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

DON DEL Morte was a man of nerve, as well as of great physical endurance, and he improved rapidly from the effects of the severe handling and choking which Darkie Dan had given him.

The fact that the one who had so nearly taken his life, was within twenty feet of him, dying of starvation, and suffering untold agonies, was also a panacea for his ills.

"It is time that Carlyon is back, for he has been long enough away to bury decently the whole Delamere race," he muttered, as he sat in his easy-chair, sipping his chocolate, several mornings after the return of Darkie Dan to his secret prison.

"Speak of the devil and his imps will appear," he suddenly cried, as he looked up, as the door opened, to see Carlyon Norman enter.

"Well, the imp has come to Hades to report to his Satanic Majesty," returned Norman, with sarcasm.

"Don't get mad, boy, because I tell you the truth; but sit down, or pull that bell and call for some chocolate."

"No, I breakfasted on the steamer an hour ago; I have but returned from Idlerest."

"So I know. Well?"

Throwing himself into an easy-chair fronting Don Del Morte, and lighting a cigar, Carlyon Norman remained quiet, and again Don Del Morte asked inquiringly:

"Well?"

"Well, the King of Diamonds is missed from his accustomed haunts, and the river men wonder what has become of him."

"Oh! they need not fret, for I will be back at the same old game soon."

"You are better then?"

"Damn it, yes! but how provoking you are, when you know how anxious I am to know if my dear departed friend was laid safely in his grave with fitting honors."

"You refer to Mr. Delamere, whom you killed?"

"In the devil's name, who else do I refer to? I certainly have not killed any one else the past week, though I have one dying now by inches close by—ah! I had forgotten, I did have a tool of mine take a life only last night."

"You need a burying-ground of your own if you keep on at this rate; but who was it last night?"

"I am the listener for the present, and I ask you, what have you done at Idlerest, or have you fallen so deeply in love with Gertrude Delamere as to have become chicken-hearted and cowardly?"

"I confess to a warm admiration for her; but to speak out, I went to Idlerest with the lamented remains, and played my part with a nerve that surprised me."

"Once I had good intentions, and loved good rather than evil, but, under your training, I think I am becoming as vile as you are."

"Don't moralize, boy; it is not good for the nerves; it upsets a man to exhume the past, and bewail his wickedness; but tell me, were you received with kindness?"

"The greatest in the world; I was top dog in the fight—I mean one of the chief mourners, for fair Gertrude leaned her tiny hand on my arm and wept, while she gazed down into the open grave—By the way, do you know I don't like graves?"

"I never saw a live man that did," growled Don Del Morte.

"Excepting sextons; but it seems barbar-

ous shutting a human being out of sight that way; it is a barbarous custom."

"Oh! you would like to pickle the dead and and keep them for parlor ornaments," sneered the Don.

"No, I would rather have them burned, as do the Hindoos with their dead, and the ashes collected and put into marble urns and set about our yards for ornaments; what a pretty sight now would it be, for one to have his relations' ashes in the ornamental vases in his grounds."

"Don't be a fool; but tell me of your trip."

"Oh yes; well, after the funeral, we, that is, Frank, Gertrude and myself, had a talk over matters and things, and I gave them the full particulars of the gambling between Fenton Delamere and yourself, as much news as was necessary regarding the duel, and then told them that I thought the notes held by you, might be bought up at a discount."

"Well, what said they?"

"I wish I was as honorable a man as Frank Delamere, and half as pure as his sister."

"In the devil's name! do you intend to turn preacher?"

"No, I was just thinking."

"Well, I don't like such thoughts: what did they say about the notes?"

"I offered to see what could be done about them, and buy them up, giving Frank Delamere a certain time to redeem them, and for that purpose, you know, I came back to the city; and, by the way, he asked me to see that his faithful slave, Darkie Dan, did not suffer for friends."

"Ah no, I have him safe; he is in yonder, and I have doomed him to death by starvation."

"Sure he has not escaped, for he is a dangerous man to be at large, and his stories would find credence enough to give us both trouble, and I would not care to have Frank Delamere on my track."

"Oh! he's safe."

"And the girl, Teresa, that aided him to escape?"

"She is safer; you see I put my detectives at work, as soon as I could speak after the choking he gave me, and found that he had taken her to an old Quadroon's by the name of Elsie, and who was once a slave, but was set free."

"The girl's fright here that day made her ill, and one of my tools, disguised as a doctor, played it on the old woman, got her confidence, prescribed for her rheumatism, and last night settled Teresa's case with a dose of poison."

"You certainly are the devil?"

"Thank you; I am honored by the comparison, but with Teresa dead and Darkie Dan dying of starvation we have nothing to fear."

"Somehow I am in dread, as long as Darkie Dan lives, for he is certainly a remarkable man, with intelligence, nerve and daring enough for a Hannibal; I would like to feel certain that he is beyond escape."

"It is easy enough: do you see yonder sword?"

"Yes."

"Take it down!"

Carlyon Norman silently obeyed.

"Its point is keen?"

"Yes."

"Its edges bright?"

"Yes."

"It should be a good weapon, for it is one I bought for dueling."

"Well?"

"Open that draw!"

Carlyon Norman obeyed.

"Take out that key, go to yonder false window, and I will show you how to open it."

"What then?"

"I will stand guard with my revolver, while you go in and drive that sword through the heart of Darkie Dan."

"Thank you; do your own dirty work," said the young man with a shudder.

"You wanted to be sure that he was dead," sneered Don Del Morte.

"Not enough to kill a dying man in that way, so I say do your own red work."

"I will," and Don Del Morte put the key in the hidden lock, to open the door to the secret chamber.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN EMPTY CAGE.

"TAKE that pistol, Carlyon!" ordered Don Del Morte, as he rested his hand on the key.

"Well?"

"The fellow is doubtless weakened by his long fast and suffering, but if he once gets you in his grip you'll find him a lion in strength yet, so shoot him down if he attempts to break over us."

"Yes, under those circumstances I can use a pistol."

"Now!"

As he spoke Don Del Morte turned the key, the door slid slowly back into the wall on either side, and both men stood agast, *for the secret room was empty.*

"Great God!"

"We are lost!"

Such were the cries that came from the lips of the two pallid men, and Don Del Morte sprung into the room, and looked under the cot.

"No, he has gone!"

"Yes, he is not here!"

They stood looking at each other in abject dismay and in silence.

The King of Diamonds was the first to gain his nerve again, and he said hoarsely:

"Satan has spirited him away."

"He has found out the secret of opening the door."

"No, for I have not been out of that room since I put him in here."

"He has passed out while you slept."

"Impossible, Carlyon, for a move would awaken me: a man who has the cause for watchfulness that I have, can never be caught napping."

"Then in Heaven's name, how has he escaped?"

"I do not know: his blanket is gone too, and see, the grating is the same."

"Ah! he could not get up there without aid."

"True; then he has— Holy Devils! I know not how he has escaped, but I do know that he is not here, and we must at once set to work."

"What is to be done?"

"I'll put my detectives upon the track, while you return at once to Idlerest with the notes."

"Suppose he gets there first?"

"Give him the lie, and prove it; the notes will aid you, and show that you are acting squarely; go to the *calabozas*—"

"Why should I go to the *cite carcel*?" and Carlyon Norman turned a shade paler as though it held terrors for him he cared not to face.

"You promised to befriend this poor Darkie Dan, go there and ask about him, and get a statement from the jailer that no such a person has been brought there, and that he knows of no such murder as was reported, having been committed."

"This, with the notes, which you have purchased, will set you all right with the Delameres, and throw suspicion upon the mysterious arrest of Darkie Dan, his returning home, as he did, disguised as an old man, and he will be the sufferer, not you."

"I believe you are right."

"I know I am; if he comes to Idlerest, arrest him, and we will together accuse Fenton Delamere of having committed suicide and state that I took the stigma of having killed him in a duel, at the request of the dying man, who did not wish the world to know that he had been so silly."

"Darkie Dan we will accuse of being crazy, and I tell you, if we put a bold face on it, we'll come out with flying colors; now go and send Deluth my chief detective to me, and then go to the *cite carcel*, as I told you, and we will take to-night's steamer up the river, for the Eclipse leaves at five."

"You intend to go, too?"

"Oh, yes; for the King of Diamonds must be at work again."

"Take care that your luck does not fail you now."

"Bah! my boy, it is not wholly luck, though I am a cool, cautious and yet daring player."

"I have a system of winning and losing to suit myself, and I can keep it up, as long as our steamboat men and gamblers get their cards from one firm."

"I do not understand you."

"Nor do I intend that you shall, my dear Carlyon. Now, *au revoir*, until we meet on the Eclipse, at five."

Carlyon Norman made no reply, and immediately left the room and the *cabaret*, while the King of Diamonds rung the bell for Monsieur Jacot, and had a long conversation with that worthy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WEAVING THE WEB.

Poor Teresa the mulattress, the victim of Don Del Morte, was laid in her grave, and the secret of her death was kept hidden by Quadroon Elsie, as she feared trouble to herself, should it become known that the girl was poisoned, for she could not bring forward the one who had given her the fatal drug.

A few of Quadroon Elsie's friends followed the body to the grave, the woman saying that Teresa was her niece, from the North, who had come South for her health, and there met her death.

What had become of Darkie Dan she kept to herself, if she knew, for she was well aware that her home was "shadowed" by spies in the employ of the King of Diamonds, and two men professing to be officers of the law, had called at midnight, and closely searched her ancient home from garret to closet, and she knew well that the object of their search was the faithful negro; but their questions elicited nothing from her concerning him.

The King of Diamonds had resumed his trips on the river, and many a planter and steamboat man was the sufferer thereby, for the luck of the famous gambler still clung to him.

It is true he often lost a game, but still more often he won, and those who watched his playing closely, observed that his winnings were large stakes, his losses small ones.

The news of the duel had gone abroad about him, and of course his having killed Fenton Delamere, the rich Mississippi Planter, added, in certain fast eyes, a certain greater halo of heroism to him, and made him a man more generally dreaded.

It is true that many wondered at the seeming mystery of that midnight duel, and who were the seconds; but as the immediate relatives of the dead man did not seek to inquire into the full facts of the case, no one else seemed to feel called upon to do so, especially when it would make the gambler their foe, and perhaps bring them in contact with him.

Up at Idlerest, the beautiful plantation home of the Delameres, a shadow rested, for the loved father and master, though in his grave, was not forgotten, and his memory was kept green in the household.

As to Frank Delamere, he seemed a changed man.

His usual friendly visits to the neighboring planters ceased altogether, and when not in his room, apparently reading, he was off on horseback, riding through the forests and wild lands, and seemed to have taken a violent fancy to pistol shooting, for, not a bird, or even a honey-bee in search of a flower, could fly near him, that he did not fire at it, and this constant practice soon made him a dead shot.

Then too he had taken a fancy to swords, and had purchased a number of different kinds, and rumor said that two hours of his ride each day, were passed at the cosey little cabin of an old soldier hermit, who dwelt on the river a few miles below Idlerest, and of whom nothing was known, other than that he had bought the little spot some years before, and, with a couple of aged slaves had removed there.

All efforts to draw him out of his shell, so to speak, made by the neighboring gentlemen had been fruitless, for they knew him as a man of education and refinement, and courted his society; but he seemed contented in his solitude, and devoted his time to his books, guns, horses and dogs.

Why Frank Delamere was received there as an honored guest was a mystery, until a negro reported, that in working near in a field one day, he had discovered the Hermit soldier as he was called, and the young Planter engaged in sword exercise behind the cabin, and Delamere's fondness for fencing and pistol-practice seemed excuse enough.

And Gertrude?

A change had come over her life, for across her path had passed one to whom she felt bound by the strongest ties of gratitude.

And that one was the man who said he had been her father's friend; the one who had brought his body home, and remained to see it consigned to the grave; the man who had cheered her brother and herself in their deep sorrow, and raised them out of the Slough of Despond.

He was the one who had bought up the notes of her father, which were held by the gambler, King of Diamonds, and told her bro-

ther that he would renew them when they were due, by accepting his notes in return.

Handsome as an Apollo, gifted, gentle, and yet manly, he seemed one to win the heart of a young girl who held no claim upon him, and Gertrude learned to regard him with feelings of affection, though she did not love him.

No, her first, her only love, had been given to another; to a young Creole whom she had met in New Orleans, a man of striking appearance, vast wealth, and a name as old and aristocratic as her own.

That man was Leon Martelle, and from his first meeting with Gertrude he had loved her, and hoped one day to call her his wife.

In her sorrow he had written her kind words of consolation, and to Frank Delamere he had offered, in a delicate way, aid, if it should be needed, hinting that he had heard the story of the notes given to the King of Diamonds.

But Carlyon Norman had saved them, and to him all the gratitude of Gertrude Delamere was due, she thought.

And who was this Carlyon Delamere?

A Kentuckian, he said: left an orphan at an early age, and a vast fortune.

He had no near kindred he told her, and coming in possession of his property, had spent his time traveling, until he was like a stranger in his own land.

And his vast wealth, his love, his hand, he cast at the pretty feet of Gertrude Delamere, only a few weeks after her father's death.

He begged her to pardon his precipitancy, yet out of his mouth his heart must speak, and he could not longer delay in breathing his love.

If she would return that love, the earth would be Heaven to him, and life be one long dream of bliss; if she refused it, if she set him adrift in the world, his heart would break, and his life would soon go down in gloom to the grave.

Such an impassioned avowal from a handsome lover, to whom she owed so much, had its effect upon Gertrude Delamere, and she promised to become his wife.

But when?

Of course Frank Delamere was consulted about this, and as the lover said he must soon return to Europe to look after some estate he had there, and hinted that the notes of Fenton Delamere, which he held, would be given over as a bridal present, it was decided that the marriage should take place within five weeks, about the day the paper held by Carlyon Norman became due.

And then Gertrude sat down to perform the saddest act of her life: to sever her engagement with Leon Martelle, the only man she could ever love, even though she was the wife of another.

The letter was written, and in it she told the whole truth, and bade the young Creole to forgive her and forget her.

Whether he did or not the sequel will show.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BEGGAR.

THE twilight shadows were coming on, the wind was howling through the streets of New Orleans, and a patterning rain was falling, making a dreary scene withal to the wayfarer.

A decrepit old negro, bent with age, and walking on crutches, or rather hobbling along, had been plying his vocation all day on the streets, that of begging, and having met with more than usual good fortune from the hands of the generous-minded, was slowly moving homeward to gloat over the spoils of the day.

"Massa, one leetle dime fer po' ole nigger, please sah."

The decrepit negro halted, and his address was to a gentleman who was passing at a rapid gait.

The rich cloak was folded closely around the tall, manly form, the face wore a look of worry; but the heart within was in the right place, and the gentleman paused, and taking out his purse handed a piece of money to the beggar.

"Lordy! Massa, dis am gole!" cried the old negro.

A smile at the old man's delight and surprise crossed the face of the gentleman, and he said, pleasantly:

"I know it, uncle; it will save you a few days' begging in this bad weather."

"T'ankee massa! fore de Lord, I say t'ankee, fer yer hab make de heart ob de ole niggy awful joyous."

But the generous giver had folded his cloak

around him again and passed on, and once more the old negro hobbled along toward his home.

His home! and such a home!

A dilapidated, deserted house, built in the old French style, and standing back several paces in a yard, where long neglected shrubbery had grown into a wilderness.

Looking closely up and down the street, to see that no eye was upon him, the old man went through the tumble-down gateway, and passing around to the back of the house took a key out of his pocket and opened the door.

It led into a hallway, and through the gathering gloom he went to a front room, in which was a pallet of straw, a wooden stool, and a frying-pan on the hearth, with a pile of wood on one side, and a box of provisions on the other.

This was the old beggar's den, where he hid away, when not plying his calling on the street.

Crossing the room, he passed over to where a broken shutter in the front still let in a little light, and took from his pocket a canvas bag.

Into this he dropped the gold-piece, and a handful of other coins, muttering as he did so: "Twelve to-day; one hundred and sixty-two in all."

The bag he returned to his pocket—no, not his pocket, but some inner sanctuary of the mysterious clothing he wore, for his old pants had served duty at some time in the past, of two pair, one half being black, the other gray, and skillfully made to do duty together, while his time-worn blue-blanket overcoat, patched with various-hued cloths, looked much as Joseph's historical coat of many colors must have appeared.

As if disdaining partiality to any one kind of apparel, one foot was incased in a boot, or what once had been a boot, and the other in a shoe, and a relic of a hat covered the white woolly head.

A "home-made" crutch, a stout stick, a dilapidated umbrella, a huge pair of iron-rimmed spectacles, and a standing collar of immense size, made up his "rig" and accoutrements, which were certainly pitiable enough looking to touch a heart of stone, taken into consideration with his snowy hair and bent form.

Having placed his treasure-bag, which the reader must admit contained a goodly sum for a beggar, the old man leaned against the window, and looked out through the broken shutter.

Instantly his manner became all attentive, for through the foliage, and gathering gloom, he saw two burly-looking men come into the yard and crouch down behind a hedge, as if meditating some evil deed.

Silently, wonderingly he watched them, and then suddenly they sprung to their feet, bounded over the hedge, and seized upon a passer-by, who, taken utterly by surprise, and at a disadvantage, was wholly in their power.

One look showed the old man that the victim was the gentleman in the cloak, who had generously given him the gold-piece, and instantly his age and sufferings seemed to fly, as if by magic, and he darted out of the house with the speed of a deer.

CHAPTER XXV.

WELL MET.

"YOUR money, or your life, Monsieur Martelle!"

Such was the threatening remark that M. Leon Martelle, the gentleman in the cloak, heard addressed to him, as he passed the dilapidated old house, after having made a call a square further on, and finding the parties out, started on his return home.

What was more, the demand for money or life was enforced by having a pistol pressed close to his face, as though the latter would be certainly taken if the former was not given at once.

M. Leon Martelle was a brave man, and not easily taken by surprise; he had also a powerful form, and was noted at his club as an athlete; he happened also to have with him his watch and chain, heirlooms in his family, and a large sum of money which his commission merchant had that day paid him, but too late to bank.

But his assailants were both large, powerfully-built men, and he remembered having seen them in the office when he had received his money, and noticed them several times after, though it did not strike him that they intended harm to him.

Now he knew that they had persistently dogged him during the afternoon, and meant just what they said, "his money or his life."

Had there been a show of a chance the young Creole would have tried strength with them; but he knew there was none, as one pistol covered his heart, another was touching his face, and his hands on either side were in a strong grasp.

"As I do not care to throw my life away, I prefer to give you what money I have," he said, sternly.

"Jist step inter this old 'yard, Monsieur Martelle; it are more safer ter do our leetle work in," said one of the ruffians, and silently the young Creole obeyed.

But ere they had gained the shelter of the nearest foliage a form suddenly darted forward, and a blow fell upon the skull of one of the footpads, that sent him to earth like a log, while a gripe of iron clutched the throat of the other, and a few rapid strokes in the face knocked him insensible.

"Well, my friend, you have done me a great service—Why, as I live, you are the old beggar; but where are your crutches?" said the Creole, in surprise.

"Oh, Master Leon, I know you now; I am—but I dare not tell, sir, only say where I can see you?" said the beggar.

"Accompany me home, after we have given these fellows over to an officer."

"Master, I dare not be seen by an officer, sir, for they will find out that I hide here in this old house."

"Have you no home?"

"None that I dare go to, sir."

"Are you a criminal, my man?"

"Master Leon, I know not what to say, sir."

"There is some mystery here; you are not the old cripple I deemed you, and you seem hiding from justice; but you have done me good service, and I am willing to do all I can for you, so tell me who, and what you are, my man."

The old negro glanced at the two prostrate footpads, both of whom had been severely stunned by the blow, and whispered something in the ear of the young Creole.

"Hal say you so? Then come with me, and we will let those fellows lie there until they return to consciousness, for if they escape now, they will get their deserts at another time; come, my man."

"Wait till I get my crutch, Master Leon," and returning to the house, the old man soon came hobbling out, and leaving the two ruffians where they had fallen, and both of whom showed signs of recovering from the stunning effects of the blow, the Creole and the beggar started down the street through the drizzling rain and darkness.

A walk of half a dozen blocks brought them to a grand old city mansion, the grounds of which occupied a square, and were beautifully ornamented with evergreens, flowers, fountains and statuary.

Passing through the iron gate, which was opened from within by a spring when M. Leon Martelle rung a bell, they went up the marble-paved walk, bordered by a boxwood hedge, to the mansion, a well-built structure of Spanish design, as roomy as a hotel and as comfortable as a palace.

A negro butler opened the massive carved door, and glanced with surprise at the dilapidated specimen of humanity accompanying his master, and with utter amazement when M. Martelle took his ragged companion into his own luxuriously furnished rooms.

Once in the handsome apartment, and M. Leon Martelle turned to the beggar and said:

"You say you were the body-servant of the late Mr. Fenton Delamere?"

"Yes, Master Leon, I am Darkie Dan."

CHAPTER XXVI.

DARKIE DAN'S STORY.

On one occasion, M. Leon Martelle had been a guest for several days at Idlerest, and then it was that Darkie Dan had met him, while afterward he had seen him when he called on his master at the St. Charles, on the various visits of Mr. Fenton Delamere to the city.

When he had sought safety by leaving Quadroon Elsie's house, Darkie Dan had determined to lay some plan by which he could aid his young master and mistress, and what this was his conversation with the young Creole will make known.

"Darkie Dan, I am sorry to see you, who

were the trusted servant, really faithful friend of Mr. Delamere, forced to disguise yourself, as though you had committed some crime," said M. Leon, reproachfully, when he turned to the negro, after the two were alone in the apartments of the Creole.

"Master Leon, it is a long and sad story, sir. Did you see in the papers that I was arrested for murder?"

"Yes, and could not ascertain who it was you killed, nor have I seen more of it since."

"For a good reason, sir; I never killed anybody—no, no, sir; I won't say that, for there is one life my hand did take; but, Master Leon, I am glad that I met you, for there is a long and dark story, sir, that I wish to tell you, as I know you are the friend of Master Frank and Miss Gertrude."

A cloud swept over the face of the young Creole, and he said sadly:

"Yes, Dan, I am their friend, though Miss Gertrude has cast me off."

"Ah, sir, she was forced to do it; it is about that I would tell you, Master Leon; but you must help me, sir, and all will come well."

"I will do all that I can for you, Dan, for you rendered me valuable service to-night, as I have with me twenty thousand dollars which those footpads saw paid to me."

"No, sir, I don't mean to ask you to serve me, but my young master and missy, and they need help, God knows."

"I wrote offering my services, Dan, but they refused."

"Lor' sir, they didn't understand all, sir; but you will help me, Master Leon, and promise not to betray what I tell you until the proper time!"

Impressed by the earnest manner of the negro, and convinced that there was some deep mystery back of his disguise and words, Leon Martelle gave the desired promise, and immediately Darkie Dan thrust his hand into the inner recesses of his clothing and drew out his treasure bag.

Then he laid his huge spectacles aside, and said slowly:

"Master Leon, I asked you for alms to-day, and in this bag I have a hundred and sixty-two dollars."

Leon Martelle elevated his brows in surprise, but made no reply, and Darkie Dan went on:

"I said, sir, I had taken one life, and I'll tell you who that was."

"My master had one bitter enemy, sir, and he attempted the life of master on several occasions, two that I know of, for I saved him each time; the last time was on a steamer coming down to the city, when he tried to throw master from the deck, after knocking him down with a club, but got the tables turned on him, for I threw him overboard."

"Nobody saw it, Master Leon, and I said that master had fallen and hurt himself, and he kept up the story to shield me."

"Now, Master Leon, my idea is, sir, that that man had accomplices, and that they are the ones who have done the wrong, since, for the King of Diamonds seemed bent on taking master's life from some hidden purpose that I cannot yet understand, and his second in the duel was also one who hated him, though I do not think they had met before."

"And your master had no second, I have heard, Dan?"

"He told me to act as such, sir, and I would not let the King of Diamonds's second, Mr. Carlyon, be called him—"

"Carlyon?"

"Yes sir."

"That is the name, or at least a part of it: Carlyon Norman," and Leon Martelle spoke rather to himself, as though thinking aloud, than to the negro, then he asked:

"And this man, Carlyon, you say was the second of Don Del Morte?"

"Yes, Master Leon, and he tried to give the King of Diamonds a sword several inches longer than the one master had, and I would not allow it, and—"

"You did right, my brave boy, and I can see that Mr. Delamere had good cause for trusting his shadow, as his friends jokingly called you: but go on about this duel."

"I believe, sir, that master could have held his own, if he could not have killed the gambler, sir; but he had been very moody after he had lost his money to the Don, and seemed not to care if he lived or died, telling me he dared not face his children after robbing them of his inheritance."

"Up to a certain time he pressed the gambler hard, and then, sir, he lost his nerve or ceased to care, and the King of Diamonds run him through."

"And he died there?"

"Yes, Master Leon, in my arms; but before he breathed his last the King of Diamonds whispered something in his ear that seemed to startle him, and he half sprung up to say something, but fell back dead."

"You did not hear what was said, Dan?"

"Only two words, sir."

"And those were?"

"My revenge."

"Ahl but go on."

"Then, sir, I was knocked in the head with a pistol barrel, bound, and brought to the city to—"

"What?"

"It is true, sir; I was taken to the rooms of the gambler and there thrown into a secret chamber in the old house he lives in; but I escaped the next day, Master Leon, through the curiosity of the chambermaid, a mulattress, who has since been put to death for having discovered the secret."

M. Leon Martelle drew a long breath, and drew closer to the negro, while he said in a low tone:

"My good Dan, your story is becoming most interesting indeed; continue, please!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

ALLIES.

In the same low, earnest tone, that carried truth with it, Darkie Dan told of his escape from the secret chamber, through the curiosity of Teresa, and of the return of Don Del Morte, the flight of the mulattress, and his fierce struggle with the gambler.

Then followed the narrative of the flight to Quadroon Elsie's home, where he left Teresa, while he, in disguise, started home to tell Frank Delamere all.

But the shock had been so great, on hearing of her father's death, that Gertrude had fallen in a deep swoon, and ere he could make known to any one what he knew, the pretended officers of the law had arrested him, on the charge of murder, and carried him back to New Orleans, where, instead of being thrown in prison as he had expected for trial, he found himself once more in the power of the very man he believed he was accused of killing.

The fate that the King of Diamonds doomed him to, was graphically described, with his determination of escape, by the files with which he had thoughtfully provided himself, and the blanket which had been given him.

Then followed the story of his escape, and what he had witnessed in the house of Quadroon Elsie, when poor Teresa was poisoned, and how he had spent his money to disguise himself, determined to beg until he had a sufficient sum to enable him to pay men to aid him in kidnapping the King of Diamonds and Carlyon Norman.

"My noble Dan, rest assured that I will back you with word, act and money in your good work, and we will at once devise some plan to foil these villains; but there is one thing that I cannot understand."

"What is that, Master Leon?" asked Darkie Dan, thoroughly delighted to have such a powerful ally to aid him as the wealthy and brave young Creole.

"It is that Miss Gertrude has become engaged to this man Norman, a second, against her father in the duel in which he fell."

"There is some mystery at the bottom of it, sir."

"So I am convinced; but certain it is that the man Norman bought up the notes of your master, paying in cash two hundred and forty thousand dollars for them, so I have heard it rumored on the street."

"There was some motive for it, Master Leon."

"But what motive, Dan?"

"Miss Gertrude, sir."

"True; but that is a large sum to pay out on a venture."

"He may have had another motive, sir."

"What other?"

"Revenge."

"Ahl that is a motive I had not thought of, and yet I cannot see how it could be worth that sum to him."

"He may not have paid it, sir."

"What mean you, Dan?"

"I mean that he got the notes, perhaps, without paying for them, sir."

"No; he came into the exchange, it is said, and sent a messenger to Don Del Morte, asking what he would take for the notes in cash."

"The Don replied by messenger he wished three hundred thousand, and this man Norman then offered sixty thousand less than that sum, and it was accepted; for he sent a check for it and the messenger returned with the notes and gave them to him."

"This I know from gentlemen who witnessed the transaction, and who did not know who Norman was."

Darkie Dan listened attentively to M. Leon's story of the note transaction, and then said, thoughtfully:

"Master Leon, as this Mr. Norman was the friend of the King of Diamonds, his second in the duel, and his comrade in knocking me down and putting me in that secret chamber, was it not strange that he went to the exchange, sir, to arrange publicly a matter he could have gone to the gambler's room and settled?"

"Dan, you are a trump, and would make a lawyer of lawyers; you reason well, and I now see that the whole transaction was a blind; by Heaven! there is some deep mystery and plot beneath all this, and we must sift it out."

"Yes, sir, and save Master Frank and Missy Gertrude; but we haven't got much time before the notes come due."

"No, what we do, we must do at once, and I mean to fathom the mystery and thwart their damnable plot, whatever it is."

"Master Leon, I have sworn, sir, before Almighty God, on my bended knees, to yet see that man, the King of Diamonds, die, and I don't intend to break my oath, sir, so help me God!"

Darkie Dan, as he spoke, had suddenly sprung to his feet, and with hands raised heavenward, and his noble, fearless and earnest face expressive of stern determination, he looked really grand, as he stood there, in spite of his disguise and tattered habiliments.

"Amen!"

Impressively did Leon Martelle speak the one solemn word, and then extending his hand the negro grasped it, and the compact was sealed between them; they were sworn allies in the counterplot to save Frank and Gertrude Delamere from the trap set for them by the King of Diamonds and his pals.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE HOME IN THE KENTUCKY HILLS.

"PLEASE, will yer give po' ole nigger, glass water, for I are footso' an' weary, 'fore God I is!"

"The simple request came from an old negro man, dressed in a suit of coarse jeans, wearing a straw hat and heavy boots, and with a bundle slung to a stick across his shoulder, tramping along a country road through the hill-land of Kentucky.

The request was made to a young, beautiful, yet sad-faced girl, apparently, who sat on the porch of a pretty cottage, around which spread a few acres in cultivation.

She was dressed in deep mourning, and was engaged in making a frock for a little year old baby that was playing at her feet.

"Certainly, uncle, come in and help yourself; there is the well, and you will find a tin cup or the nail by the bucket," she said, pleasantly.

"Hain't got no bad dogs ter bite de ole nigger, has yer, missy?" cautiously asked the old man, rolling his eyes to first one side of the house and then the other.

"We have dogs, but they are in the field with father, and I would not let them bite you anyhow."

"T'ankee, missy; you is a awful good lady," and having drawn up a bucket of cool, fresh water from the well, and first politely offered a tin cup full to the lady, the old man refreshed himself by a generous draught, and then said:

"Can de ole nigger sit down an' rest his ole bones, missy?"

"Certainly, and if you are not in a hurry we will have dinner soon and I will give you some."

"T'ankee, missy, I isn't in a hurry when dar is any eatin' goin' on, fer I is a wery good feeder; but is dat your leetle brother?"

"Oh, no, it is my little daughter," answered the young mother with a smile, glancing at her pretty, dark-haired darling.

"Go 'long, missy, you hain't ole enough ter have a chile like dat."

"Oh, yes, I am older than I look; I am twenty," answered the young mother, with that refreshing air of innocence, which all women assume when they tell their age, provided they are not beyond what they consider one of their sex has a right to fight shy of making known about the number of years they have lived upon the earth.

"Waal, I declar' yer doesn't look it ter me," said the gallant old man, and he told no lie; then he added:

"But yer doesn't look jist happy like."

The large blue eyes turned upon the old negro quickly, and tears welled up in them, as she answered:

"You are right, Uncle, I am not happy, for the one I loved most in the world is dead."

"What a pity, missy; but death don't spare nobody, whether we loves or hates 'em, when he gits his grip on 'em; has he been long dead, missy?"

"I heard the news three months ago only; he was my husband, the father of my little child, and, though I live for this little one, I can never be happy again."

"Po' missy; I feels so sorry for yer; but don't cry, or yer make ther ole nigger go 'long on his way; dat's right, dry dem pretty eyes, an' tell de ole man what are de name o' yer little boy?"

"I named him after his father, Norman."

"Norman! it am a pretty name, an' I know'd a gemman by dat name one time."

"You knew a gentleman by the name of Norman?"

"Yes, missy; he were a han'some man, an' lived in Orleans, whar I is jist from; yer sees, I has kinfolks in ole Kaintuck an' I have come up here ter see 'em 'fore Gabriel's horn blower call de ole nigger home, fer yer see I looks like a wery ole man, missy?" and he took off his straw hat to show his snowy head.

"Yes, you are no longer young; but you haven't walked here from New Orleans, have you?"

"Lor' bless you, no, missy; just from ther railroad station some ten mile back."

"And you live at New Orleans?"

"I lives on plantation 'bove de city, missy, fer I is a slave; but I has a pass, missy—good papers ter show de ole nigger all right, and hab lebe ter wisit he kinfolks in old Kaintuck; want ter see paper, missy?"

"No, thank you, for I believe you; but was it on your plantation that you met the Norman that you knew?"

"No, missy, I know'd him in de city, an' he were a gay young feller, I kin tell you, an' did look a little like your baby, fer he were awful han'some, missy; he name were Carlyon, I b'lieves."

"Carlyon! What! Why, my husband's name was *Norman Carr Lyon*. Was it my husband that you knew?" eagerly asked the young wife.

"Yes, missy, dat were he name, but he call bisself *Carlyon Norman*."

"No, no, it could not be that Norman had changed his name, for surely he would not be guilty of such a thing; but then he was in New Orleans, and it was there that he died, and—and—oh! I know not what to think."

The young wife had spoken aloud, but seemingly to herself, and now turning to the old negro, she continued:

"When did you last see this gentleman of whom you speak?"

"Bout two weeks ago, missy."

"Then it was not my husband, for poor Norman died months ago."

"He were very han'some young man, missy, an' as I say he looks like dat baby boy."

"How strange; but what was his business?"

"I b'lieves he gamble fer a livin', missy."

"Then it was not Norman; my husband inherited some money, half a year ago, and he went to New Orleans to invest it in some kind of business, and I have never seen him since, but got word that he died there suddenly, and his money was sent back to me by the kind gentleman who nursed him in his illness, and was his friend, and who had him buried."

"Does yer know de name o' his friend, missy?"

"Yes, Del Morte."

"I knows him too, missy, and he are de man I has often see'd yer husband—I means Mr. Carlyon Norman—wid."

"Oh, God! can there be some strange mystery in all this?"

"Dunno, missy; doin' works almighty strange nowadays; dat little boy am de image

o' de Carlyon Norman I knows, an' I will sw'ar dat he hain't no mo' dead den I is."

"What strange doubts you put in my mind, old man," said the young wife, sternly.

"Missy, I don't want to put no doubts in yer mind; I tells yer de truf: de man I knows, Carlyon Norman, are Norman Carr Lyon, I will sw'ar, an' ef yer wants me to prove it fer yer, jist go ter Orleans wid de ole nigger."

"I will go," was the firm response, and the old negro knew that she meant it.

"You is right, missy; den dere will be no doubt."

"No, and to remain here doubting him, not knowing whether he was dead or alive, would kill me, for I have loved him since he was a student at college, and I a school-girl, and he seemed contented to remain here in a little home after our marriage, until he received from his guardians the fortune left him."

"It was only a petty ten thousand dollars, but it took him from me, and if your words are true, old man, I would rather that he were dead, than be what you say he is; but I shall know soon, for I start to New Orleans to-morrow."

"And I goes wid yer, missy, for I wants ter sho' yer de ole nigger don't lie."

CHAPTER XXIX.

TWO PACKS OF CARDS.

"GENTLEMEN, I am at the service of any one who cares to indulge in a game of cards."

The speaker was the well known gambler the King of Diamonds, and he stood at the bar of the steamer Natchez, and glanced, as he spoke, over the crowd of passengers who had come forward to the Social Hall for a smoke after supper.

There were on board wealthy planters from Natchez, Vicksburg, and elsewhere on the river, merchants from the towns going to New Orleans to purchase a stock of goods, Western horse-traders with a drove of fine cattle to offer in the city markets, and sports, willing to pluck an innocent player of his spare change.

All had learned to know the King of Diamonds, at least by hearsay and sight, if not by experience, and it was becoming rather difficult for him to find one who would risk a game with him.

With a remembrance of his recent winnings, and the fate of Planter Delamere in their minds, all seemed to hang back from accepting the invitation of Don Del Morte, though they were glad to play, if a game could be arranged among themselves.

Seeing that no one stepped forward a rather disdaining youth, with a boyish, handsome face, said modestly:

"I am not much of a card-player, but I will join you."

The King of Diamonds glanced superciliously at the speaker, and said:

"For what sum, young sir?"

"I cannot make it very large, sir."

"Say a thousand as a starter?"

"Oh no, sir," and the youth colored deeply.

"Then I will leave you to some of the lesser hawks to pick, as they call us of the sporting fraternity," said the King of Diamonds insolently.

The youth stepped back into the crowd abashed, when suddenly another person stepped forward, and said quietly:

"I will play with you, sir."

"For no stake less than a thousand."

"For five if you wish it, only I must get a new pack of cards from the office."

"As you please, sir," was the indifferent reply, and the young gentleman crossed to the office, asked for a fresh pack of cards, paid for them, and returned to the table, at which the gambler had seated himself.

"Cut for deal, sir," he said quietly, and the King of Diamonds put his hand on the cards, but started suddenly and cried angrily:

"Where did you get those cards, sir?"

"From the office, sir."

"Say, Leavitt, did this gentleman get this pack of cards from you?"

"Sir!" and as the gambler turned to the clerk to await a reply, he saw a white, angry face glare in his own, and knew that he had one to deal with that he could not insult with impunity.

"Oh, yes, Don, I sold them to him, why?" called out the clerk quickly, as if anxious to avoid a difficulty that he saw brewing.

Instantly the gambler turned to his opponent, and said pleasantly:

"I beg your pardon, sir; it was not that I doubted your word in the least, only that I could not but think there was some mistake."

"Why should there be?" was the cool question.

"Because these cards are marked."

"Impossible!"

"It is true, sir, for I see the marks upon them."

"Then take another pack," was the indifferent reply.

"Here, Leavitt, kindly bring what cards you have there," called the King of Diamonds, and the clerk obeyed, placing a box containing about a dozen packs on the table.

"They are all alike; I recognize the mark on them by which cheats at cards can defraud their opponents; why did you not get them from the same book-store, Leavitt, where you have always gotten them before, for that firm can be depended upon?"

"These were sent on board as a sample, and the captain took them; I am very sorry, gentlemen, that such a mistake should occur, and I shall see the firm of whom they were purchased, and have an understanding of the matter," said the clerk apologetically.

"You say that you know the mark upon these cards, sir?" asked the young man who had bought the pack, addressing the King of Diamonds.

"Perfectly well, sir; I can read it across the table, and could cheat you with them."

"I will risk it."

"But, sir, I have a pack here; it is true, I used them on the way up the river, but they are not worn, and they are reliable; we will use them," and the King of Diamonds threw a pack upon the table.

The young man took them up, eyed them closely for a moment, and said calmly:

"I will keep these as a souvenir of the famous Don Del Morte, better known as the King of Diamonds."

"But, my dear sir, they are nothing, and if you wish a souvenir of me, I will give you—"

"No, I will take nothing but these cards; they are, as you say, valueless in an intrinsic way, but valuable as being the cards with which the King of Diamonds has played."

There was a shadow of sarcasm in the tone of the young man as he spoke, and the bystanders, as well as Don Del Morte, saw it, and the former were dreading an outburst from the gambler; but he said pleasantly:

"You are welcome to them, sir, after our game is finished; but I warn you that I have a wonderful run of luck, and you may not be so anxious to have them for a souvenir after we have played together."

"But I will take them now," and quietly placing them in his pocket, he continued:

"And now we will play with a pack of these cards which you say are marked."

"Why, sir, I could cheat you out of every dollar you have."

"I will risk it."

The cool reply, and the fearless manner of the young man caused everybody to admire him, and they gathered more closely around the two, to see how the affair would end.

"But I will not permit it, sir, as I think too much of my good name to play with cards I know to be marked," persisted the King of Diamonds, and for the first time, those who knew him well thought that he was a trifle nervous; but the reply of the young man startled them, as it did the gambler, for cool, distinct, and fearless came the words:

"Your good name! why I was not aware that you had any."

The King of Diamonds turned very pale, and a deathlike silence fell upon the scene, as he asked in a voice that slightly quivered:

"Do you intend to insult me, sir?"

"Oh no, I merely said I was not aware that the King of Diamonds had a good name to guard from dishonor."

"I ask again, sir, if you wish to insult me?" said the gambler with fearful calmness.

"Oh no, I wish to play you a game of cards."

"With marked cards?"

"Yes."

"Do you understand the marks on them?"

"I do not believe that they are marked."

"But I say they are, sir."

"You certainly should know, sir, gambling being your profession."

Again the King of Diamonds knew not how to take the remark, and he said with some show of anger:

"I see, sir, that for some reason, you wish to seek a quarrel with me."

"And I say that I only wish to play cards with you, accepting the invitation you gave for an opponent, and it looks very much to me as though you feared to play with me."

"I fear no man, sir," was the haughty response.

"You certainly fear these cards."

The gambler arose quickly to his feet, and said sneeringly:

"I see, sir, that there is no chance of our having a game of cards together."

"If there is any other game that I can oblige you in, I am at your service," was the provokingly cool reply.

But, to the surprise of every one the King of Diamonds made no reply, but walked over to the office, and asked in a low tone:

"Leavitt, who is that young man?"

"Let me see, I gave him state-room 20," and running his finger down the steamer's register, he stopped at a name opposite No. 20, and said quickly:

"Why, Don, that is young Delamere."

"Great God! do you mean it?" cried the gambler, taken wholly off his guard.

"Yes; I have not seen him for years, not since he was a boy, as he has been North at college; but see here, he is registered."

"Frank Delamere—Idlerest Plantation, Mississippi."

"Holy Satan!" and with this impious remark the King of Diamonds lighted a cigar and went on deck to commune with his own thoughts.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ASSASSIN'S PLOT.

SHORTLY after the King of Diamonds left the brilliantly-lighted cabin of the steamer, for a smoke and a promenade on deck, a large man, evidently one of the sporting fraternity, of the lower order, judging from his loud style of dressing, and general appearance, followed him, though with no apparent intention of doing so.

The King of Diamonds was pacing on the after part of the deck, and there the man referred to joined him, remarking bluntly:

"You gave me the tip."

"Yes, I wish to see you on an important matter."

"You took water when the young fellow crowded you, what was it?" insolently asked the man.

"That concerns me, not you, Scotty."

"I am glad of it; but I didn't think any man could make you back."

"Circumstances alter cases; but I have a job for you, Scotty."

"I'm wanting one, for these planters are gettin' so sharp we can't play 'em as we once did, and my pile is getting low."

"I'll raise it for you; what do you want, to do a job?"

"Depends upon the nature of it," was the cautious reply.

"It's not a very easy task."

"Ah! it's killing!"

"Yes."

"Why don't you do it and save your money?"

"Because I would at once be suspected; I want that man removed from the way."

"Ah! you mean the one who just saddled you?"

"Yes."

"He didn't do much to be killed for."

"His name his Delamere."

"What difference does that make?"

"Have you forgotten that I killed a man by that name a few weeks since?"

"Ahal I see, I see, as the blind man said when he tumbled off the dock."

"What do you see?"

"You are afraid of him?"

"I fear no man, not even you, you red-handed bully and swindler!" savagely said the King of Diamonds.

"Pat calling the little black," was the laconic reply.

"I wish him out of the way, and I want you to do the job."

"You could save the money I would charge you."

"Yes, and get nabbed; no, I wish to be in the cabin when it occurs, and no one will suspect you."

"How is it to be done?"

"Get him on deck some way, knife him, and throw him overboard."

"What's the figure?"

"Two thousand dollars."

"For what?"

"For killing him."

"Bah!"

"What is the matter?"

"I'll charge two thousand just to get him out on deck for a promenade."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want two thousand for the prouenade; two thousand for doing the work, and one thousand for throwing him overboard."

"You shall have it."

"Guess I spoke too quick."

"You'll get no more; in New Orleans I could get it done for a thousand."

"Life's cheaper there than on a steamboat; but I'll do it, so give me the money."

"After you have done it."

"After Christmas! I want the money now, and if the job isn't done well, then you can brand me among our gang as a thief."

"All right; here is the money," and he counted out, by the reflection of the light through the stained windows of the ladies' cabin, the sum agreed on.

"Now do your work well."

"Oh! I ain't no half-way worker, as you know, king."

The King of Diamonds then left the deck and returned to the cabin, and was soon after followed by his confederate in crime, who glanced carelessly around and discovered Frank Delamere seated at a table writing.

Going to his state-room Scotty, as the King of Diamonds called him, wrote on a slip of paper these words:

"Do not betray me, but after a while come on deck, aft, just over the stern, and I will give you some points on the man who killed your father."

Concealing the paper in his hand he began to pace to and fro in the gentlemen's cabin, each time passing the table where Frank Delamere sat, still engaged in writing.

By a dextrous movement when no one was looking, he laid the piece of paper upon the table, saw the young Planter take it up and read it, and then give a glance and a nod at him, and continue on with his writing.

"That settles that: now to do the other work, for he'll come," muttered Scotty as he left the cabin and went on deck.

Five minutes after Frank Delamere arose and also left the cabin, little dreaming what would be the result.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SCOTTY'S LITTLE GAME.

WHEN the scene occurred between the King of Diamonds and Frank Delamere, the latter had not been on the boat an hour, having gotten on board at the last landing, which was the Idlerest Plantation.

Among those who had seen him come across the gangplank just at twilight, were a youth and an old negro, who were standing on the hurricane deck, conversing earnestly together, the latter seemingly pointing out to his young companion the objects of interest ashore, for the lights were beginning to glimmer in the mansion, and a small army of slaves were going along the river bank toward their quarters, having completed their day's task in the fields.

When the youth adjourned to the cabin to supper, and afterward, from some motive known only to himself, accepted the gambler's invitation to play with him in a game of chance, the old negro had stood out on the guard, eagerly watching the scenes within.

And still watching, as he crouched back in the shadow of the baggage piled up on the forward guard, he had gazed into the illuminated cabin, and seen the King of Diamonds come out and ascend to the deck.

Cautiously he followed him, and was about to walk up, apparently to speak to him, when he heard a step, and sprung quickly, remarkably so for a man of his age, into the hallway of the "Texas," as the upper part of the Mississippi steamers is called.

Here he stood unseen by the plotters, and heard their low talking together though he only now and then caught a word of what was being said.

After first one and then the other had departed, the old negro followed, for he feared some trouble to come in the cabin, and was curious enough to wish to witness it, so stationed himself once more in the shadow of the trunks.

From this point of observation he distinctly

saw Frank Delamere, engaged in writing at a table amidships, and the gambler, Scotty, walking near him, and then lay something down before him.

When Scotty came out the old negro again followed him, and once more sought the refuge of the "Texas" hallway, or companionway.

A few moments passed with the gambler under the espionage of the old negro, and then was heard a quick step, and Frank Delamere walked aft and joined Scotty.

It was evident that the aged black had expected some deviltry to follow, but certainly did not anticipate Scotty would be so quick in his work, for, hardly had Frank Delamere approached him, where he stood on the extreme edge of the deck at the stern, when the lights from the ladies' cabin flashed on bright steel, and a keen blade descended quickly into the young planter's breast.

Having delivered his blow, the assassin seized his victim in his arms to throw him overboard; but Frank Delamere was not dead by any means, and clutching his enemy he endeavored to throw him to the deck, and both men went over the low railing into the steamer's wake.

"Man overboard! man overboard!"

The cry came in stentorian tones from the old negro, and ringing over the steamer was heard by the pilot and many others, and instantly the headway was checked.

But, after giving his thrilling cry the aged black had sprung into the river, and as the steamer's speed was slackened, all heard from the dark waters:

"Quick! lower a boat! here we are!"

While the boat was being rapidly lowered by the "hands" of the steamer, the negro, with a few powerful strokes, that seemed to give the lie to his age, had reached the two struggling men, for Scotty had met his match, wounded as was Frank Delamere, and it seemed as if they both must drown together.

But a black face suddenly appeared between them, and Scotty was seized by the throat with a grip he could not shake off, while once, twice, thrice a knife was thrust into his side.

Instantly his hold relaxed, and he sunk from sight.

He then seized Frank Delamere, who was supporting himself with difficulty, and upheld him on his arm, turned to await the coming boat.

It was not far away, but ere it reached them, Frank Delamere had become a dead weight in the arms of the negro.

"Here away!" he shouted to those in the boat, and the next instant the limp form of the young planter was drawn over the gunwale.

"Now t'other one!" ordered the mate in charge of the boat, and the crew leaned over to seize the negro, but could discover no one.

"There certainly was another," said the mate.

"Yes, massa; I seen him, too, an' he were a bigger," replied one of the crew, and an African himself.

"He jist handed de gemman up fer us ter take him in," responded another of the crew.

"Then skin your eyes and look for him!" was the order.

But "skinning eyes" did no good, and the boat was compelled to return to the steamer without the brave negro who had sprung overboard to save Frank Delamere.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PASSENGER TAKES A HAND IN THE DON'S LITTLE GAME.

WHEN Frank Delamere was carried back to the steamer, and was found to be wounded severely, if not fatally, and the mate told his story, there was much indignation among the passengers, and while the young Planter was taken to his state-room, and left in the care of a physician, who fortunately happened to be on board, a search was begun for the man who had dealt the blow.

Then a person who had been in the pilot-house, chatting with the pilot, reported that he had seen a large man walk aft, and shortly after another join him, and instantly there was begun a struggle between them, and he had hardly called the attention of the wheelman to the circumstance, when over the stern they went together, and a second after, a third person ran aft, and, crying out that there was a man overboard, sprung after them.

To find out who these other two persons were, as Frank Delamere was the wounded

man, was the question, and the boat's crew reporting that the one whom they could not find being a negro, the youth before referred to started with surprise, and soon after, having carefully searched the steamer, stated that his old negro companion was missing.

Another search among the passengers, every state-room having been visited, resulted in the discovery that a river sport known as "Scotty" by his friends, and registering as Wash. Nap. Scott, which being interpreted reads Washington Napoleon Scott, was missing.

The man was a known bad character, had been seen to leave the cabin before Frank Delamere did, and he was set down as the intended assassin, and many thought it a cause of congratulation to Mr. Scott that he had either been killed by the Planter or the negro, or swum ashore, as there is little doubt but that the sport would have been swung up between the huge smoke-stacks as an ornament.

"I fear Scotty was the man, for I remember to have heard him make a threat against Mr. Delamere," said Don Del Morte, insinuatingly, as he pressed forward to the state-room of the wounded and unconscious man, and addressing the physician in charge, continued:

"Doctor, I hope you will do all that you can for the boy, for, though, as you know, his father and myself had trouble, and we had a few words to-night, I wish him well, and you can call upon me for any amount to aid him."

"Skill, not money, will alone save him, sir," said the physician, sternly; but, unabashed, the King of Diamonds continued:

"I am an excellent nurse, sir, and will offer my services with the greatest pleasure."

"I should think it would kill him to open his eyes and see his father's murderer hanging over him."

All eyes turned upon the speaker, and with surprise they discovered it to be the youth who had offered to play cards with the gambler.

He was a well-dressed, handsome yet sad-faced young fellow, with a slender, graceful form, and a modest, retiring manner; but he met the fiery gaze of the gambler unflinchingly as he wheeled upon him and asked in a suppressed tone:

"Do you seek a quarrel with me, boy?"

"No, for I should shoot you as I would a mad-dog did you attack me," was the calm reply.

"Well, sir, I shall give you the opportunity to try," and the King of Diamonds started toward the youth.

The steamer was just backing out from a small riverside village, where it had landed, and several passengers who had gotten on were just going back to their state-rooms, conducted by a steward, when the King of Diamonds sprung toward the youth and added, menacingly:

"I will clip your ears, boy, to give you cause to remember me!"

The youth had thrust his hand into his breast pocket, and stood his ground; but before he could withdraw it, one of the passengers going ast, dropped his sachet and blanket-roll, and seized the gambler by the shoulder, while he said, sternly:

"Coward! you shall not touch that boy."

Livid with rage, Don Del Morte turned upon the man who dared oppose him, and beheld a tall, dark faced man he knew well by sight, and, strong as he was himself, he knew he dare not attack him, while already the other held the advantage, as his hand held a small Derringer, for he had expected the gambler to draw a weapon at once.

"You shall answer for this, M. Leon Martelle," he hissed.

"Like my lamented friend Delamere, whom you murdered, I have no objection to waive the fact of your being a blackguard, and still meet you," was the cool rejoinder.

"Then my friend shall call on you when we arrive in the city."

"So be it; see that he does, for if he does not I shall call on you," and the handsome young Creole took his sachet and traveling-blanket, which the youth had picked up and handed to him, while he said earnestly:

"I have to thank you, sir, for interfering in my behalf, for that man meant mischief."

"And he still means mischief, so you had better beware of him; but what is the matter on board?"

"A Mr. Delamere has been badly wounded by an assassin," answered the youth.

But Leon Martelle waited to hear no more,

as he moved quickly toward the state-room, in which Frank Delamere lay, the doctor still bending over him, and doing all that skill could do to save him from death, for his life hung by a most slender thread which a feather-weight might break.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SWIM FOR LIFE.

WHEN the old negro upholding Frank Delamere in his arms, saw the boat coming toward him, he suddenly thought that he had done something which the law of the land might not view with a very generous eye—*id est*, taken the life of the gambler Scotty.

The sport had attacked the young Planter, not him, and he had followed them into the water and driven his knife into the one to save the other; but where had been his right in so doing? might be asked if he was brought to trial for it.

Now to be tried for the killing of the sport, or for anything else, was what the aged black wished most to avoid, and consequently, he decided upon a course of action to escape all personal trouble in the matter.

As soon as the boat's stern backed up to him, he handed up the unconscious Planter, and then, while they were drawing him over the gunwale he sunk from sight beneath the turbid and murky waters.

An expert swimmer, he remained under the surface for nearly a minute before he came up, when he saw the boat looking around for him, and immediately, getting a gasp of air, he again sunk down, swimming away from the spot as fast as he could.

Another rise, and another swim, and he saw that the boat was returning to the steamer, believing him lost.

"Now for the Mississippi shore," he muttered, and boldly he struck out for the nearest bank, which was distant a quarter of a mile.

With his clothes and boots on, and his exertions in the water, he soon became greatly fatigued, and looked around for a floating log to cling to.

Not far below him he discovered a dark object, which he reached, after an effort, and was glad to find that it was the trunk of a tree, with several small branches attached, and capable of bearing his weight.

To this he clung, and when well rested, began to urge it shoreward.

It was hard work, and yet he dare not leave it, for fear fatigue would overcome him, and he struggled on manfully.

At length he managed to ground it on the Mississippi shore, and, barely able to move he tottered out of the water, and sunk down upon a grassy knoll to rest.

Overcome by sleep and fatigue he sunk to sleep, and never awoke until the morning sun shone in his face; then he awoke with a start, glanced around him, as if striving to recall his scattered senses, and then uttered a cry of horror, as his eyes suddenly became fixed upon an object not ten feet from him.

It was the form of a human being, lying half in the water, and with one arm clinging around the log which he had shoved ashore.

One look into that face, and the negro recognized the man he had killed, and who, in his dying agonies had clutched the log.

With a look of awe he moved toward the form, and bent over it, half-drawing it from the water.

As he did so the unbuttoned coat displayed in the inner pocket a number of new bank-notes, and these he drew out, muttering:

"I heard him say five thousand was his price; here is just that sum, and I get his reward."

He thrust the package of bills in his pocket as he spoke, and then, though not without a hesitating movement, and a shudder, took the watch and jewelry that the sport had worn in profusion.

"I am no robber of the dead, and if he has kin they shall have these, but not the blood money; that's mine," he murmured.

After awhile he shoved the tree off into the current, with its ghastly freight still clinging to it, and with the remark:

"It better be going down-stream than be found near me, should anybody see me here. Now to find out where I am, and to continue on to the city, or that poor child will not know what to do."

Rising, and stretching his stiffened limbs, after another glance at the floating log and its

ghastly load, he walked along the bank, until at last he came to a wood-yard, attended only by an aged negro, seemingly as old as himself.

The wood-yard tender eyed him suspiciously as he came up, until he asked pleasantly:

"Hasn't yer got a word ob good-mornin', brudder, fer a Christian friend?"

"Whar yer from fust?" was the cautious reply.

"Out ob de ribber last."

"Yer looks wet all ober."

"I is wet outside, an' dry inside, fer I tumbled off de steamer last night, an' dey didn't pick me up; yer see, brudder, I was travelin' wid young master down de ribber, an' yer see whar I am now, while he am on de boat, an' I wants ter catch de next boat ter de city."

This explanation seemed to satisfy the old wood-yard overseer, and he answered:

"Waal, what I has yer is welcome to in de shape o' wittals, an' massa lets me have a leetle dram ter keep away de chill an' fever, an' I'll gi'n yer some, brudder, fer I is a hard-sheller o' de Baptist persuasion, an' does unto my feller man as I'd have him do to me; is you a Baptist, brudder?"

"No, my massa's folks is all Episcopals, an' I 'tends dat wurship."

"Is you a 'zhorter, brudder?"

"No, brudder, I isn't a 'zhorter."

"You is ole enough!"

"Yas, but I isn't good 'nough."

"Oh! waal, come inter my cabin an' git somethin' ter eat, fer yer hasn't got much time as de Shotwell is a comin' long soon."

The visitor accepted the invitation, and, by the judicious use of a little money, made an exchange of his wet clothing, for the "Sunday suit" of the pious wood-yard overseer, and with a brotherly shake of the hand, the two parted when the Shotwell came to the bank, in obedience to a signal displayed that she could get a passenger, and, who gave his name to the clerk as *Daniel Dorcas*.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHAT THE YOUTH REVEALED.

THE physician, who had kindly volunteered his services to take charge of Frank Delamere, was acquainted with the young Creole Martelle, and readily admitted him to the state-room as a nurse.

But close on his heels followed the youth, and when they would have barred his way he looked up so pleadingly and asked so softly to be admitted as an assistant that neither the doctor or M. Leon could refuse him.

Immediately he set to work, and with a touch as soft as a woman's, bathed the heated head and performed numerous little tasks, that showed he was an adept at nursing, and the doctor remarked:

"If he has you to nurse him, my young friend, my word for it that he will soon get well."

"Then he shall have me, sir, for I will remain with him."

"Did you know Frank?" asked M. Leon, as the doctor left the state-room for a short time.

"No, sir; I never knew him before to-night."

"You take a strange interest in him for a stranger."

"It is the same feeling prompts me that caused you to kindly come to my aid when the King of Diamonds would have sprung upon me," was the quiet reply.

"And did you ever meet that man before?"

"No, sir; I saw him first when he came on the steamer at Vicksburg."

"May I ask if you are a Mississippian?"

"No, sir; I am a Kentuckian."

"Ah! from what part?"

"I live not far from Paris, sir."

"Pardon me if I seem inquisitive; but do you know a family there of Lyons?"

The youth started, and his face flushed; but after a slight hesitation, he said:

"My name, sir, is Lyon."

"Indeed! I wished to ascertain regarding a man whose name was Norman Carr Lyon."

Again the youth started, and the Creole could not but notice it; but, before more was said, the doctor returned and said:

"Mr. Martelle, the clerk would like to see you, sir, regarding some cattle to be landed at your plantation, which we are nearing."

The young Creole arose and left the state-room, and the youth eagerly asked:

"What is that gentleman's name, sir?"

"M. Leon Martelle; he is a very wealthy Louisiana planter."

"Excuse me a moment, please," said the youth, and he quickly left the state-room.

Going forward, he saw M. Leon conversing with the clerk, and as he finished and started back to the state-room of his wounded friend, he joined him and said:

"Mr. Martelle, can I see you for a moment in private?"

"Certainly, my young friend; come into my state-room," and the young Creole led the way.

"Mr. Martelle, do you know a person by the name of Dan Dorcas?" asked the youth.

It was the Creole's time to start now, and he said, quickly:

"Yes, indeed; he is better known as Darkie Dan."

"It is the same, sir; well, he was my companion on this boat to-night, and the one that you heard had sprung overboard to try and save Mr. Delamere."

"Great God! Darkie Dan was on this boat a while since?"

"Yes, sir, and he has perished, I fear," and the youth's voice quivered.

Leon Martelle arose and paced to and fro a moment, and then said:

"I can now understand why an aged negro, as they called him, sprung overboard to the aid of Frank Delamere; it was Darkie Dan; but I cannot believe he has perished, and think I can understand his not wishing to return to the steamer, so my opinion is that we will see him again."

"I hope so, sir, for he is a noble man, and it was what he told me that brought me here."

"What! are you anything to the Lyon I spoke of?" and the Creole gazed fixedly at the youth, who answered frankly:

"Mr. Martelle, I know that you and Dan have a plot together, for he told me as much, and that he traced where had lived one who calls himself Carlyon Norman, and came there to glean proof of his evil doings."

"Dan told me all, and I will frankly say that we, my parents, my friends and myself, believed Norman dead, for news to that effect had been sent us; to prove that he was false, that he is the base creature that Dan has told me he is, I came with him, and we were on our way together to New Orleans."

"And you know then that Dan's aged appearance is a disguise?"

"I do, sir."

"And is this Carlyon Norman kindred of yours?"

The youth's face flushed, and he seemed greatly embarrassed; but, after an instant, said frankly:

"Mr. Martelle, I will hide nothing; I too am in disguise, for Norman Carlyon is my husband."

Had a bombshell crashed through the boat it could not have surprised the young Creole more, and he gazed into the face of the pretended youth with a strange look.

Taking her soft hat off, and looking at him, the deserted wife continued:

"I determined to see for myself all that my husband was, and I assumed this male attire, cut off my long hair, and came with Darkie Dan."

"To-night, when I saw the King of Diamonds, I wished to play cards with him, for the purpose of getting acquainted with him, and asking him to take me as a young sporting protege, that I might the better dog his steps, for Dan had told me of his intimacy with my husband."

"Suspecting, I know not why, that he was at the bottom of the attempted assassination to-night, I was drawn into a controversy with him, which you prevented from going further; but I am a dead shot, and I would have killed him, had he come nearer."

"Now, sir, you know my secret."

"And I shall hold it sacred, while I will soon give you proof, painful as it will be to you, that your husband is as vile a man as is the King of Diamonds."

"Dan has worked hard, and in a dozen disguises, has ferreted the lives of those two men out, and I tell you frankly, there is a web drawing around them that must soon strangle their lives out."

"I care not, for I have a revengeful nature, Mr. Martelle, and Norman Lyon shall find that I can hate even harder than I can love," and the eyes of the deserted wife flashed with the intensity of her feelings against the man who had so bitterly wronged her.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE FRUIT OF EVIL RIPENING.

DON DEL MORTE was again in his sumptuous rooms, and from the anxious look on his face it was evident that something was going wrong with him.

"Come in!" he cried as a knock came at the door, and, as he did so he dropped one hand to his side, as though he wished not to be taken by surprise, while a slight *click, click*, told that he was fingering a pistol, should the visitor be a foe.

"Ah, Carlyon, it is you, is it?" he said, evidently relieved.

"Yes," said that worthy, entering and throwing himself upon the lounge.

"Well, what news?"

"I start to morrow for Idlerest, and the agony must soon be over; if it is not, I shall drop it, for the strain upon me is fearful."

"Bah! look at me; I have had a strain on me ever since I was old enough to understand just what I was."

"In three days those notes are due; on the day you are, you marry Gertrude Delamere, and then, after the three days, grace is up, come down on Frank Delamere for payment; of course he cannot pay and you take his plantation and negroes, let him know who you are—"

"But who am I?" asked the young man impetuously.

"Don't be in a hurry; you will know too soon for your own good."

"I feared so."

"Well, as I was saying, you marry the girl, come down on her brother for the property, get possession, tell them who you are, and they will hang their heads in shame, and be turned into the street as beggars, and my revenge will be complete."

"And I."

"Oh, you will be the possessor of a splendid plantation and slaves, that will yield you fifty thousand a year easily, and you can trump up charges against Gertrude that will give you a divorce from her, and, after the affair has blown over, you can marry some lovely heiress in the city."

"But the shock will kill Frank Delamere, and I expect Gertrude will be driven to take her own life."

"What care you? let it kill him; curse him! He should be dead now, instead of getting well from that wound that Scotty gave him."

"Have you ever thought of who that old negro was that jumped over to his rescue?"

"I know: it was that black fiend, Darkie Dan; but he jumped to his death that time, though he has escaped so often before; but what in the devil's name he was doing on the steamer, in company with that youth, I cannot understand, yet I am certain I was not mistaken in the negro; what do you think of M. Leon Martelle refusing my challenge after telling me he would fight me?"

"I do not know what to think; did he refuse altogether to meet you?"

"Yes, and I have a mind to post him as a coward."

"Better not, for you are not very popular of late."

"So I see and know; I must fight a duel with some prominent person to raise the King of Diamond stock again in the market; but I am sorry you will not be here to attend the grand *bal masqué* two nights hence."

"Yes, I would like to, but I am anxious about this business yet to be done."

"You can attend that and then catch the steamer up in time, for the Eclipse has advertised to delay starting until an hour after midnight."

"No, I am too nervous to attend balls."

"Don't be nervous, for it will wear out the tissues of your life; will I see you again before you go?"

"No, I do not wish to attract attention by coming here, for I tell you, you are not a savory mortal on the tongues of the people now, and I fear you are watched; but tell me, what is the secret of my life, that is to gain you such revenge upon the Delameres, and for which you have struggled so hard?"

"You are not nervous now?"

"No, not exactly."

"Take a stiff glass of brandy and it will steady you."

"I will," and the brandy was drank at a draught.

"I'll take a glass too, for it will put an edge on my words; are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Sit there, where I can see you; there! now listen, for I wish to make known to you what has blackened my whole life, and which, I am not painting the lily in saying, will make you worse than I am, for you have it in you by inheritance," and with a mocking laugh the King of Diamonds threw himself back in his easy-chair and began his story.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A STORY OF SHAME.

"NORMAN CARR LYON, allow me to tell you that you are mistaken in believing that to be your name," began the King of Diamonds, in his sneering way.

"But what's in a name? I called you, when we began business together, Carlyon Norman, and it has an aristocratic sound."

"You were born, some twenty-three years ago, on a farm on the banks of the Tennessee river, and your mother was a Miss Ruth Lyon, the daughter of a well-to-do farmer."

"And my father?" somewhat anxiously asked the young man.

"Don't be impatient, boy; your mother was sent to Nashville to boarding-school, and fell in love with a young medical student there, as he did with her."

"He was a fast youth, was studying medicine with the remnant of a small fortune that had been left him, that he might not starve when he had spent the last dollar of it, and the maiden's father writing to the faculty for the character of the youth who had won his daughter's young heart, that august body simply wrote back that he had no character."

"The irate farmer came to Nashville at once for his daughter, and found that she had fled with her admirer."

"He pursued so closely that the youth had not time to stop *en route*, and get the matrimonial knot tied, and putting it off from day to day it became an old story, other lovely faces flitted before him, and the result was that the poor girl, your mother, went back to her father's home on the Tennessee to die, but before dying to give birth to an infant, yourself, my boy."

"Go on!" said the young man, in hoarse tones, as the King of Diamonds paused.

"Oh! I have no idea of breaking off in my pleasant story; well, the old farmer was broken-hearted at his daughter's death and wrong-doing, and neglected his business until he was sold out, and when he died the boy, you, went to an orphan asylum, where you remained until your grandfather left you a small sum of money to educate you, and more to be given you when you reached your twenty-second year."

"My grandfather?"

"Yes; on your father's side; but now comes the other part of the story; that grandfather was a Mississippi planter, a man of wealth, good old name and refinement."

"He traveled extensively throughout his own and foreign lands with a tutor, until he was of age, when he struck off on his own hook to enjoy his fortune."

"In his wanderings, he met a lovely young creature who won his heart; she was a governess in a wealthy family, and, after a very short acquaintance he married her, and they went to Europe together."

"Shortly after their return, and while at a New York hotel, they were confronted by a gentleman who claimed the lady as his wife."

"Of course a scene followed; but it was of no use, the woman was a mere adventuress, some ten years older than she professed to be, had deceived her first husband, as had also those who professed to be her parents, for she was a Cuban Octoroon, palmed off on them by her wily mother, in place of their child, who died when but a few days old."

"By this woman your grandfather had one child, a boy, and he, the boy, was your father."

"His father, though separating from the woman forever, had a good heart, and cared for his little son, giving him every advantage; but marrying a year or so afterward, a Southern beauty and heiress, he left the boy to the care of others, and he grew up pretty much as he pleased."

"When his father died he left him a small inheritance, and also to the grandson he left a little fortune, and hoped that the secret of his former connection with the Octoroon would ever remain a secret from the world; but before dying he confessed all to his son, who was none other than Fenton Delamere."

"I can guess the rest, and know now the cause of your hatred for the name; you are the son of the Cuban Octoroon," said the young man in a hoarse tone.

"Your perspicuity is great, my boy," was the sneering reply.

"Yes, and I am your son."

"True; I am Oscar Delamere, the half-brother of the man I killed; and whom I hated because he was well born, and when we met, knowing my life from his father's lips, he pitied; and you are my son, and your name is Norman Delamere, and you are to drag your sweet cou-in, Gertrude, down by wedding you, and are to get possession of Idlerest, and if there is a taint in your blood, and you cannot find the marriage certificate of your parents and grandparents, you can at least keep the secret and hold your head up nobly."

"Well, I cannot but say that as a villain I am proud of my father; as a man I have no respect for him," sneered the son.

"How mutual are our feelings for each other; it is like father like son, for you are indeed a chip of the old block; but if I dragged you from your Kentucky home, and used a part of your inheritance as a stepping-stone, having squandered my own, in return I give you a lovely bride, make you rich, and raise you to a position of honor among men; but you have my story now, my son, and I don't wish to detain you; but come to see me as soon as you return on your wedding tour, and I will see you through to the mastership of Idlerest."

Norman Delamere, as I will now call him, made no reply, but with a bitter smile, and a mock-polite bow, he left the room, bearing a sorrier heart than he had ever before known.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A TOMBSTONE THAT LIED.

ALONG the shell road leading to the lake, a stylish carriage was rolling, having on the box a negro coachman and footman in livery.

The horses were full-blooded, and fast steppers, and the whole equipage indicated that it belonged to some family of ancient lineage and vast wealth.

In spite of a high hat and its gold band encircling it, the velvet collar worn nearly up to the ears, and a beard, a close observer would have seen in the coachman a familiar face seeking disguise under a false beard and driver's livery.

But he held the reins with a master hand, and sent the fine boys along at a slapping pace, until they came to a grand gateway, leading to one of the pretty cemeteries in the environs of New Orleans.

Entering this, he brought his horses down to a walk, out of respect to the dead that slept around him, and, apparently with some destination in view, held on through the shell drives to a distant part of the burying-ground.

Arriving at a mound, or rather elevated circle, upon which were a number of graves—for the dead are not buried in New Orleans *underground*, unless in raised land, on account of the shallow depth at which water is found—he came to a halt, and the footman springing down from the box opened the door.

Two gentlemen then got out—no, but one gentleman, for the first one to spring to the ground was the supposed youth whom the reader met on the steamer, but in reality the deserted wife of him whom the reader now knows as Norman Delamere; the other was M. Leon Martelle.

"This is the spot, is it, Dan?" asked the young Creole, turning to the coachman.

"Yes, Master Leon; yonder is the grave; the one with the marble urn."

M. Martelle and the disguised woman walked slowly to the spot indicated by Darkie Dan, and halted before a grave, at the head of which was a marble urn; they read on the base of the monument as follows:

IN MEMORIAM

NORMAN CARR LYON,

BORN IN TENNESSEE, MARCH 1st., 18—:

DIED IN NEW ORLEANS, SEPT. 1st., 18—:

AGED, 22 YEARS AND 6 MONTHS.

May he rest in peace."

"Oh! the lies that inscriptions tell!" exclaimed the poor wife, and she bent her head in seeming shame and sorrow, while M. Leon said:

"Ben, go to the sexton's house yonder, and

tell him to come here with his assistant, prepared to open a grave, for I have a permit."

The footman darted away, and in about ten minutes returned, accompanied by the old sexton and his son, carrying their spades on their shoulders.

"My man, I have a permit here to have this grave opened; take it and see that there is nothing irregular about it."

"Your word would be sufficient to me, Mr. Leon Martelle; return the paper to your pocket, please," replied the sexton.

"Thank you, and accept this for your trouble," and he handed to the sexton and his son a gold eagle.

The money not only brightened their eyes, but seemed to act upon their muscles, as does oil on machinery, for they set to work with such right good will, that before very long there came back the hollow echo from the coffin, as the shovel struck it.

A short while more and the box was opened, and the sexton leaned over, at M. Leon's request, and unscrewed the coffin-lid.

Instead of a dead, upturned face to look upon, those who gazed down into the coffin, saw that it was only full of sand.

The sexton looked at M. Leon in utter amazement, and his son looked at him, while the supposed youth turned away; but the Creole said calmly:

"It is as I expected; throw in the dirt again, my man," and he also turned away, while the old grave-digger leaned on his shovel, and said aloud:

"Well, in thirty-five year at this business, I have never seen a tombstone tell a bigger lie than this one do."

M. Leon gave a light laugh, waved adieu to the sexton and his son, and said simply:

"Drive home, Dan!"

And away rolled the elegant turn-out from the pretended grave of Norman Carr Lyon, and back on the cushioned seat sat the deserted, deceived wife, her face covered with her hands.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN BORROWED PLUMAGE.

THE grand *bal masque*, which the King of Diamonds had regretted the inability of his son to attend, was an affair at which only the *creme de la creme* of the society of the Crescent City was expected to be present.

It was to be given in the Hotel St. Louis, in the *grande salon*, and a guard at the lower entrance was expected to scrutinize every comer, so that no uninvited guest could gain admittance.

And yet Don Del Morte quietly made his toilet for the ball, with no misgivings of being refused, and why, his half aloud self-communings will tell.

He was to go in the full dress uniform of an American naval officer, and as he dressed he talked.

"I was lucky in meeting that naval officer at a time when he was short of money, for he readily sold me his ticket at the handsome price I offered him, and the guards will not know that I am not Captain Delorme, as, now that I have shaved my long beard off, and gotten this blonde dye off of my hair and eyebrows, I hardly know myself when I look in the mirror.

"It has cost me a good round sum to find out the costumes that my friends were to wear; but I shall be repaid by throwing a seed of unhappiness into every ear I can catch for a moment's chat.

"There's old Cleaves, who manufactured those marked cards for me, which gave me such luck, as men called it; he dresses as a Quaker, and I will stop his pleasure by whispering that the steamers' captains who bought their stationery of him have suspected some thing wrong with the cards, and that detectives are working up the case against him; old Foster, who has just indorsed Dowd's note for a hundred thousand, I will tell that Dowd was a bankrupt, and scare him badly, while I'll whisper to Jennings that his son has committed forgery; then that handsome Mrs. Vincent must be told that her husband is not on his plantation, but traveling with a fair companion, while Judge Dore shall receive information that his eighteen-year-old wife is false. Oh! I shall have lots of fun, making people miserable by lies, and I shall not forget M. Leon Martelle, who has spent thousands for the jet-black armor he is to wear to-night; let me see, I'll tell him what I intended to charge

Frank Delamere and his sister with, for he loves Gertrude; yes, I'll tell him that their mother was an Octoroon, and if he resents it, then we will have the duel which he refused to meet me in, and I shall kill the Black Knight, for such is the name he takes to-night.

"By the way, I must hasten, for the time wears on apace," and drawing on his gloves, and fitting his mask to his face, the King of Diamonds threw his cloak around him and descended to the court of the *cabaret*, where a carriage awaited him.

Ever cautious, he did not drive to the Hotel St. Louis in this vehicle, but reaching a hackstand, he hailed another, paid his other *coche* and told the one he had just hired where to drive.

The driver soon drew up at the Rue St. Louis entrance to the hotel, and alighting, Don Del Morte dismissed his vehicle, and passing across the handsome portico, entered the vestibule and ascended to the suite of ball-rooms and their dependencies on the second floor.

Here stood the guards who examined the tickets of invitation, and referred them to two of the reception committee who were near to settle any dispute.

With the coolest air imaginable the King of Diamonds presented his ticket, and said pleasantly:

"Shall I unmask, monsieur?"

"Oh, no, Captain Delorme, your card is regular and your uniform carries it out," was the polite response.

The Rubicon was passed, and with a look of devilish triumph in his eyes, and which fortunately his mask concealed, the gambler entered the ante-chamber, gave his cloak to a servant, and the next moment strolled leisurely into the magnificent *salon*, on the floor of which were fifty cotillions, while hundreds of others were promenading around the hall, resting in the gilded alcoves, or conversing, laughing and flirting with their neighbors.

It was a scene of splendor, and with the strains of music, the moving throng, the gay maskers, the murmur of voices, the myriads of lights from blazing chandeliers, it presented a scene which almost dazzled the King of Diamonds with its grandeur and beauty.

One long glance around the room, and the devil in the man rose uppermost, and he set to work to sow seeds of sorrow in every heart that he felt was happy.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BLACK KNIGHT AND THE NAVAL OFFICER.

SOME half hour after the King of Diamonds had entered the *grande salon* of the Hotel St. Louis, a carriage drove up to the Rue St. Louis entrance, and a tall form, clad in black, shining armor alighted.

"That is M. Leon Martelle's *coupé*," said one of the numerous throng, who were watching the animals with envy in their hearts, that their lives had not led them in more pleasant places; but, unheeding the remark the armed knight ascended the broad marble stairs, and halting before the guard, extended his card and ticket of invitation, while deep in his visor, which effectually concealed his face, he said, politely:

"Good-evening, messieurs; shall I unmask?"

"Assuredly not, M. Martelle; pass in, please," was the quick response, and, having no outer garment to deposit in the ante-chamber, the Black Knight was ushered into the *grande salon*.

His tall form, commanding appearance, and superb armor, with the helmet shaded by an immense black plume, attracted universal attention, and ere he had half circled the room, he was the cynosure of all eyes.

"Ah, my dear M. Leon, I have been anxious to speak with you," said a mask coming toward him, and slipping his arm in his.

"Are you not mistaken, sir?" asked the Black Knight in an indifferent tone.

"Oh dear no, my dear sir, you are M. Leon Martelle."

"May I ask how you made that discovery?" inquired the Black Knight.

"A spy at the door, you know, gave me the knowledge."

"And may I ask whom I address, for you have the advantage of me."

"Oh, call me Captain Busybody, or anything you please, for I am a busybody, a real gossip, and have got the news of the town down on my fingers."

"That is just where your conversation holds no charm for me, sir."

"Oh! but I can tell you that which will

interest you; a real tid-bit of news, you know."

"It is strange that such a one as you profess to be, should seek to disgrace the uniform of our navy by appearing in an officer's dress."

"Now you are severe, my dear M. Leon: don't be cross, but listen to me, for I am a regular ferret, and have discovered a piece of news about your most intimate friends, I may say regarding one, whom you once hoped to make dearer than a friend."

"Sir?"

"I refer to Mr. Frank Delamere and his lovely sister."

"Well, sir, what do you know of them?" was the stern question.

"Much; I know that you have escaped a mesalliance which you can be thankful for."

"I do not understand, sir."

"Oh, I can make it plain, my dear M. Leon."

"Do so, please."

"In a word, sir; Mr. Delamere, the father of Frank and Gertrude, had in his family an Octoroon nurse, and, his wife being childless, this woman's children were taken and reared as his own."

"You are an accursed liar!" came the words, stern and determined.

"Sir!"

"I mean it, and will add a coward."

"You shall answer for this, M. Leon, for I shall force you to fight me," hissed the King of Diamonds, for he it was, savagely.

"Force me! why I will make you retract those words within half an hour."

"Never!"

"Then come with me, sir."

"Not to-night; to-morrow, at another time, I will meet you, but not now."

"You shall now!"

"I say no!"

"Then I shall proclaim publicly that you are not Captain Delorme, whose ticket you bought, but Don Del Morte the—"

"Hold! breathe not who I am here, or you know these excitable Creoles would tear me to pieces, and give me no chance for my life."

"Then take the chance I offer, and come with me."

"Lead on, and I will follow," was the calm reply.

The Black Knight obeyed, and passing out of the saloon the two men turned into the corridor leading to the hotel.

"Waiter, we wish a room for awhile; it must be secluded, and we wish no interruptions," said the Black Knight.

"Shall I bring a pack of cards, Monsieur Martelle?" asked the *garçon*, calling him by name, as it had become rumored around that the black armor concealed M. Leon Martelle.

"Yes," was the short reply, and soon after the two men were led to a small room, heavily curtained, in a distant part of the hotel.

"Come and call us at two o'clock," ordered the Black Knight, and, as the waiter's retreating footsteps died away down the corridor, he continued, addressing the King of Diamonds:

"Now, sir, the difficulty between you and I shall be settled here, and it must be your life, or mine."

"I am content," was the reckless reply, and it was evident that the gambler, relying on his skill and nerve, felt no fear of the result.

"You have a sword, sir, and having seen the weapon you were to wear to-night, I got one just its length, for I came here to meet you, Don Del Morte, the King of Diamonds."

"You'll be sorry you ever crossed swords with me, Leon Martelle; but come on, for I see the weapons do put us on equal terms," and the gambler drew his weapon, while the Black Knight unfastened his body armor and removed it.

"Now, we are on equal terms, Don Del Morte, and I am ready."

With a clash the swords came together; but from the first pass the King of Diamonds felt that he had underrated the swordsmanship of M. Leon, and tearing off his silk mask, he bent to his work like a man who had undertaken a task which he was doubtful of accomplishing successfully.

From the very first, too, the Black Knight seemed bent on destroying his foe, ere the clash of the swords might draw some one there and thus interrupt the duel, and he pressed his antagonist to the wall, and, with a strength that was amazing, he beat down the gambler's guard, and drove his sword into his body to the hilt.

Catching him in his arms before he fell, he cried excitedly, while he threw aside his helmet.

"Hold on, Mr. Oscar Delamere! you shall not die until you see who has slain you."

"Great God! You are Darkie Dan!"

And the gambler shrunk away in an agony of dread even in his dying moments.

"Yes; I am Darkie Dan, and I have avenged my poor master's death, and all that you made me suffer."

Darkie Dan said no more, for the ears he addressed heard him not, for the guilty soul of the King of Diamonds had fled from the polluted casket that bore it.

Rising, Darkie Dan stepped to the table and picked up the cards given him by the *garçon*, who, believed the room had been engaged for a quiet little game, and he sprinkled them over the body, all except the King of Diamonds, and across this he wrote hastily:

"Killed in a duel."

A fitting end for the King of Diamonds.

This card he placed on the forehead of the gambler, and resuming his helmet and breast-armor, he left the room and the hotel.

CHAPTER XL.

ON THE BRINK.

THE day, set for the wedding of the treacherous Norman Delamere, as the reader now knows him, to Gertrude Delamere, dawned bright and beautiful, and the household were astir at an early hour.

There was to be no display, for the bride was in deep mourning for her father, and her brother was yet an invalid, and suffering from the wound he had received, and which was fortunately not as severe as was at first supposed.

Only the overseer was to be called in as a witness, and the clergyman who performed the ceremony, was to be accompanied by his wife, and then, after a wedding breakfast, the young married pair were to take the first steamer down to the city.

The groom, smiling and handsome, had come up two days before, and his happy face was in strange contrast to the sad countenance of Gertrude, who each day felt more and more that she was giving her hand where her heart could never go.

At last the overseer's bell tolled the hour of ten, and the negroes began to wend their way to the mansion, and Gertrude, dressed in a traveling suit, and accompanied only by the minister's wife, entered the parlors, where her brother reclined on a lounge, pale and sad-looking, and was conversing with the clergyman.

Presently the groom entered, and then followed Una, weeping bitterly, and the negroes crowded the halls and windows silent and mournful.

"It seems more like master's funeral than Miss Gettle's wedding," sighed Una, as the clergyman took his stand and the groom led the bride forward.

But before a word was spoken by the minister, the negroes were seen surging away from the door, and in strode a tall form, and a hundred voices cried out:

"Darkie Dan!"

"Yes, I am Darkie Dan, and master, I forbid this marriage, for it is a mockery, as that man already has a wife."

The stern, ringing tones, addressed to Frank Delamere, were heard by all, and like a frightened bird Gertrude bounded away from the side of the man she had expected to call husband, and her brother arose slowly to his feet.

"It is a lie!" shouted Norman Delamere, turning livid.

"Darkie Dan never told a lie, sir, and I must have proof that his statement is false before the ceremony goes on," was the stern reply of Frank Delamere.

"Master, I have proof," and turning Dan made a sign, and a woman, young, sad-faced, yet beautiful, glided into the room.

"Great God! you here?"

It was all that the guilty man could say as he staggered back; but in scathing tones the wronged and deserted woman, said:

"Yes, I, your wife, am here, Norman Delamere, and he whom you call Darkie Dan has laid bare your treachery and guilt."

"Are you this man's wife?" asked Frank Delamere, in a voice of suppressed calmness, while his sister clung close to his side.

"I am."

"You speak of him as Norman Delamere."

"Master, that is something that I will explain, sir, for I have a little box of papers to give you," cried Darkie Dan, quickly, not wishing to have the secret betrayed there before all.

"Well, sir, be you who you may, I shall hold you responsible for this insult, and, as you own this place now, my sister and myself shall at once depart from it."

"Hold on, master, those notes can be redeemed right here," cried Darkie Dan, and, at another sign, in walked M. Leon Martelle, who bowed pleasantly, and said:

"Yes, Frank, I will pay to this lady the sum of fifty thousand dollars, agreed upon with her, and return the notes to you, for this fellow paid nothing for them, and will not need funds where he is going."

Like a wild beast at bay Norman Delamere glared upon his accusers, and then, as if grown desperate at the fearful situation he found himself in, he thrust his hand into his breast-pocket, and, without withdrawing it, there was heard a smothered report and he fell dead in his tracks, slain by his own hand.

CONCLUSION.

To picture the excitement in New Orleans, on the finding of the body of the famous King of Diamonds in the room of the hotel, when the waiter, at two o'clock went to call the occupants, as directed, would be impossible.

Of course the secret of how he gained admission to the *bal masque* came out, and it was at once said that M. Leon Martelle had killed him, and many rejoiced at the circumstance; but some days after that was contradicted by the young Creole, who came out in a card and stated that he had not attended the ball, but had been entertaining some friends at his own home, all of whom verified the statement, and thereby cast a mystery over the gambler's death, that none could solve other than two persons, and those two preferred to keep secret how well their little plot as allies had turned out in the end.

For the sake of Gertrude, the tragic end of the man she had believed so honorable was kept secret as much as possible; but it leaked out by degrees, and to save her annoyance, M. Leon Martelle begged her to go to Europe as his wife, and always loving him, she gladly consented, and they were accompanied on their tour by Frank Delamere, to whom Darkie Dan had told the mystery he had discovered by digging up the box in old Mr. Delamere's grave, and suffering as he was with his yet unhealed wound, it so impressed him that his physician ordered him away from home for a year or more.

Before their departure, however, there was a second marriage in Idlerest mansion, for Una, the Quadroon, became the bride of Darkie Dan, whom his master left in full charge of the plantation, well knowing how thoroughly he could be trusted.

Back to her Kentucky home went the deserted wife, and in rearing her boy and keeping from him the story of his father's crimes, she spends her days and is content, though happiness will never be her lot on earth again, for ever green in her memory is the grave on the banks of the Mississippi, where sleeps, dishonored, the man whom she so fondly loved.

As to Darkie Dan, he followed his master's fortunes through the long years of battling for the Lost Cause, in which Frank Delamere rose to the rank of a general and won great fame, and refusing to meddle in politics, he devotes himself to cotton planting, and to-day is one of the "shining lights" of his race, who little dream what a story calm-faced, dignified Daniel Dorcas could tell of the Mississippi Mystery, and the days when he was the Black Nemesis.

THE END.

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